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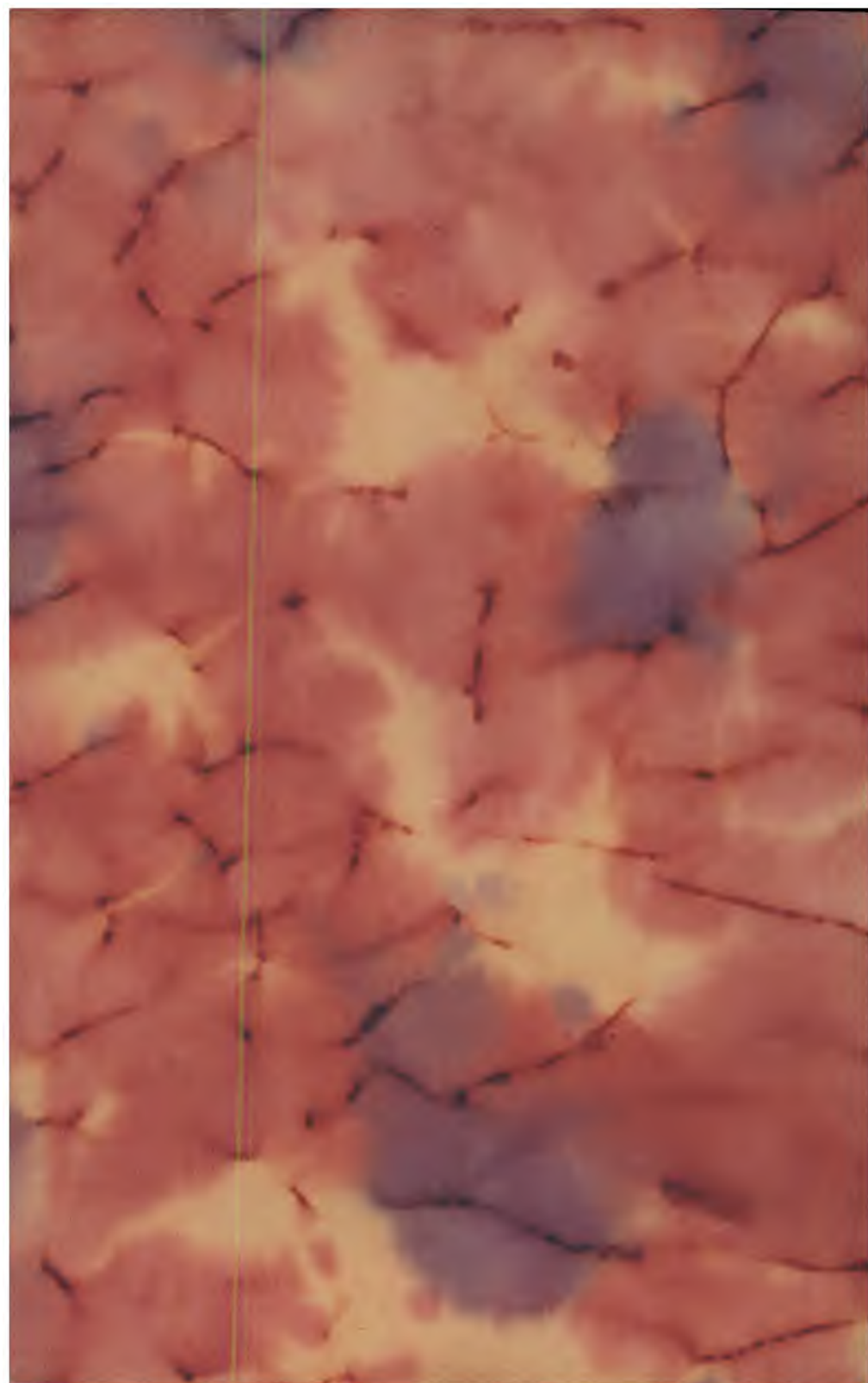
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THE CHEVALIER DE BOUFFLERS





At Boufflers, 1750

Engraving by J. B. Ponce



THE CHEVALIER DE BOUFFLERS

A ROMANCE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

BY NESTA H. WEBSTER

(MRS. ARTHUR WEBSTER)

AUTHOR OF "THE SHEEP TRACK"

" For life, with all it yields of joy and woe ;
And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,—
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is ;
And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
Such prize despite the envy of the world,
And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all."

BROWNING, *A Death in the Desert.*

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY

1916

TO
MY HUSBAND

PREFACE

IN history, as in modern life, the most celebrated people are not necessarily the most interesting. Historians, like journalists, have predilections for certain personages whom they combine to immortalize whilst passing over others who often present a far more absorbing psychological study. This is particularly so in the history of the eighteenth century in France. We have been told a dozen times the story of Julie de Lespinasse and her love-affairs modelled on "Clarissa Harlowe," of Madame de Staël and the victims of her amatory experiments, of Madame du Deffand, Madame Geoffrin, of Lauzun, Fersen, and Lafayette; yet one of the greatest romances of this enthralling period, the love-story of the Chevalier de Boufflers and the Comtesse de Sabran, has been allowed by English writers to pass into oblivion. Theirs was *the* "grande passion" of the times, "they loved each other," says Monsieur Victor du Bled, "with a deep love, so different to the *liaisons à la mode*, with a love such as we understand it"—we of to-day.

Both curiously modern, their letters have none of the rounded periods and stilted phrases of their contemporaries; they talk to each other, smile, laugh, and weep—we can almost hear them as we turn the pages. More than any other woman of her day—far more than the cynic of the Couvent Saint-Joseph—Madame de Sabran might be called the "Sévigné of the eighteenth century." Several writers have compared the two women, for both in character and circumstances there are striking points of resemblance between them, but

Madame de Sabran was far more original than her seventeenth-century predecessor. "I feel your charm like that of Madame de Sévigné," Madame de Staël once wrote to her, "and in a greater degree, for there is more real feeling beneath it."

Madame de Sévigné, for all her wit, was quite conventional, and perfectly satisfied with the outer show of things. She entertained a deep respect for society, whilst Madame de Sabran was apt to be bored in crowds, even when composed of all the most important people; her simple, naïve letters, sometimes wrongly dated, often not dated at all, sometimes hastily scribbled at midnight when she was tired out after a party, sometimes lengthened out into lively *causeries*, have none of the tabulated accuracy of the great marquise, who, as she sat at her writing-table in the Hôtel Carnavalet, doubtless realized that her words would survive in large and magnificently bound volumes on the library shelves of the future. Madame de Sabran evidently never thought of publication; essentially a creature of moods, she wrote just as she felt, with something of the impromptu charm of Chopin, now gay, now plaintive, with here a little flash of temper, there a gleam of ever-lurking humour, here a riotous *joie de vivre*, there a tender melancholy, then all at once a wild outburst of passion like a stormy passage in the "Nocturnes" that in its turn dies down into peace and harmony once more.

So whilst Madame de Sévigné, alert, observant, at the Court of the Roi Soleil, was busy memorizing for posterity—and posterity does well to be grateful—Madame de Sabran in those rooms a hundred years later was too often dreaming to tell us all we should like to know; we must wait till she has been amongst fields and woods and mountains for her pen to let itself go in those exquisite descriptions of the world of Nature that was her true element. "J'ai été rêver toute l'après-midi dans un petit bois émaillé de fleurs.

Jamais le temps n'avait été si beau, ni le rossignol si amoureux ; il chantait à me rompre la tête. Devine, si tu peux, à qui je rêvais. . . ."

What was the lover to whom she wrote these nocturnes, and of whom she dreamt as she listened to the nightingale ? Perhaps the strangest lover that has ever destroyed a woman's peace of mind. In turn a seminarist, soldier, sailor, explorer, poet, social reformer, politician, and farmer by profession ; a wit, a rake, a libertine by nature, Boufflers was, nevertheless, that rare anomaly, a libertine with a heart, as much Don Quixote as Don Juan, alternating his amorous adventures with wild, unpractical schemes for bettering the conditions of humanity, beneath whose irrepressible gaiety—*ma trop grande gaiété*, as he regretfully described it—lay that *bonté sans mesure* that makes it difficult to be as severe to him as one would wish. I have no desire to whitewash Boufflers ; judged from the moral point of view, he was a bad man, yet he had something in him that many of his more virtuous contemporaries lacked, something that has escaped the authors of his biographical notices—a soul that, too often stifled by evil passions, found itself at last in a great love. So, as Monsieur Bardoux has expressed it, the author of cynical epigrams and licentious poems "a donné dans un siècle frivole le plus rare exemple d'amour vrai."

This is the Boufflers I have tried to show, the Boufflers to whom the woman he loved could say : "C'est mon âme qui t'aime !"

.

The story of the Chevalier de Boufflers and the Comtesse de Sabran was first given to the world in a large volume of their correspondence, "La Correspondance inédite du Chevalier de Boufflers et de la Comtesse de Sabran, 1778-1788" (Plon-Nourrit), edited by MM. de Magnieu et Prat in 1875, and compiled from the

original MSS. bequeathed by Elzéar de Sabran to his friend the Vicomte de Magnieu in 1842.

Unfortunately, this collection of letters—some of the most exquisite in the French language—was preceded by an inadequate biographical notice, supplemented by very meagre notes, whilst the writers' omission to date many of their letters resulted in a confusion that only infinite patience on the part of the compilers could have avoided. To the uninitiated reader the narrative was, therefore, almost impossible to follow, the more so because no biography of either of the writers had ever been written. Since then their story has been related by several authors in fragmentary form—in books dealing with them as members of a group, or with short periods of their lives, and finally Monsieur Gaston Maugras in his series—"La Cour de Lunéville," "Les dernières années de la Cour de Lunéville," "La Marquise de Boufflers et son fils le Chevalier," and "La Marquise de Custine"—has enabled us to follow through four enchanting volumes the career of the strange Chevalier.¹

In this book, therefore, I have attempted, for the benefit of English readers, to weave into a whole the fragments taken from all available sources—preferably contemporary sources—having recourse only to the works of modern writers for information that was not to be found elsewhere. It must be understood that nothing imaginary has been added, and if here and there the story reads like fiction rather than fact it is simply because more intimate details have been recorded about these two people than about most of their contemporaries. The dialogues introduced have been either translated verbatim or merely transposed from reported to direct speech. The following are the works from which this book has mainly been compiled :

¹ This series is not the biography of Boufflers, but the picture of a whole society—a vivid and fascinating description of life in the eighteenth century, through which the story of Boufflers recurs intermittently.

The early life of the Chevalier de Boufflers from : * "La Mère du Chevalier de Boufflers," by E. Meaume (1885) ; "La Réunion de la France et de la Lorraine," by the Comte de Haussonville ; * "Le Chevalier de Boufflers et la Comtesse de Sabran avant 1788," by Pierre de Croze (an article in *Le Correspondant* for February 10, 1894) ; "La Cour de Lunéville," by Gaston Maugras (Plon-Nourrit), 1906.

The early life of Madame de Sabran from : * "Le Chevalier de Boufflers et la Comtesse de Sabran, 1788-1792," by Pierre de Croze (Calmann Lévy), 1894 ; "La jeunesse de Madame de Sabran" (articles in "La Revue de Famille"), by Lucien Perey, 1891.

Their lives after their meeting in 1777 to 1787 from : * "La Correspondance du Chevalier de Boufflers et Madame de Sabran," by Messieurs de Magnieu et Prat (Plon-Nourrit), 1875 ; * "Lettres du Chevalier de Boufflers à la Comtesse de Sabran," by Paul Prat (Plon-Nourrit), 1891 ; "La Cour de Lunéville, dernières années," by Gaston Maugras (Plon-Nourrit), 1906.

Their lives after 1789 from : * "Le Chevalier de Boufflers et la Comtesse de Sabran," by Pierre de Croze ; "La Marquise de Boufflers et son fils le Chevalier," by Gaston Maugras (Plon-Nourrit), 1907 ; "La Marquise de Custine," by Gaston Maugras (Plon-Nourrit), 1907.

The story of Delphine de Custine in the Terror from : * "La Russie en 1839," by Adolphe de Custine (1843).

Besides these, I have found in the following contemporary and modern writers stray details concerning either Boufflers or Madame de Sabran :

Contemporary *mémoristes* : Voltaire, Rousseau, Grimm, Bachaumont, Chamfort, Rivarol, Charles Briauf, Cheverny, La Harpe, the authors of "La Galerie des États Généraux," Horace Walpole, the Prince de Ligne, the Comte de Tilly, the Marquis de Bombelles,

* The books marked with an asterisk are out of print. No edition of their letters is now available.

Madame du Deffand, Madame de Genlis, Madame de Staël, Madame Vigée le Brun, the Duchesse d'Abrantès, and the author of "The Mémoires of the Marquise de Créquy."

Modern authors : Octave Uzanne, Eugène Asse, Taschereau, and Arsène Houssaye in biographical notices to editions of Boufflers' works ; Mm. Michaud and Jal in their biographical dictionaries, Monsieur Druon in a "Discours à l'Académie de Nancy," Boudet de Puymaigre in "Poètes et romanciers de la Lorraine," Monsieur Fuinel in "La Plume et l'Épée," Lucien Perey in "Le Duc de Nivernais" ; Monsieur Victor du Bled in "Les Causeurs de la Révolution" ; Joseph Turquan in "Les Femmes de l'Émigration," Monsieur de Lescure in "Rivarol et la Société française," Monsieur Bardoux in "Madame de Custine," Monsieur Imbert de St. Amand in an article "La Comtesse de Sabran," H. Morse Stephens in his "History of the French Revolution," Lady Blennerhassett in her "Life of Madame de Staël," etc.

If the story of Delphine de Custine in the Terror appears a digression from the main theme of this book I hope it will be forgiven on account of its interest. This appealing and dramatic episode of a period described to us more often by fiction than by facts, is all too little known in England, and seems to me to gain in force by being related as the sequel to Madame de Sabran's own life and attitude towards the coming Revolution. Indeed, the history of the Chevalier de Boufflers and Madame de Sabran would be incomplete without these pages of family history dealing with the immense crisis in which they played a part. The life of Delphine should be read by every one to whom this story appeals in "La Marquise de Custine," by Gaston Maugras. For the purpose of this book, however, I have not referred to this work of Monsieur Maugras, but have taken the story direct from the account given by Astolphe de Custine.

Besides reconstructing the story I have endeavoured to reconstruct the background on which it was enacted—the Revolutionary Era ; and if, to my more erudite readers, I seem to have enlarged on this subject at too great length, I would point out that many facts about the Revolution familiar to those who have studied it deeply are yet little understood by the general public in England for whom this book is intended. Learned works such as Alison's " History of Europe," " The Cambridge Modern History," etc., have naturally stated the case accurately, but in almost all *popular* books, the Revolution has been persistently misrepresented, and in consequence a host of popular delusions have grown up around it which must be dispelled if one would present fairly the point of view of those who played their part in that amazing drama.

" The French Revolution," said Burke, " is the most astonishing thing that has hitherto happened in the world." It is also the most complex—a fact of which the writers who reduce it to the simple proposition of an oppressed people rising against tyranny give no idea. We must read about it for years, in French, and preferably in contemporary records, before we can begin to understand anything of its causes or its results.

Besides contemporary records I have consulted for this book, as far as possible, impartial authorities, such as Taine, Droz, Martin, and also Louis Madelin, whose lucid and delightfully written history of the Revolution is perhaps the best popular work on the subject, and as an *ouvrage couronné par l'Académie* may be fairly regarded as the expression of enlightened French opinion.¹

As will be seen by the list of sources from which this book is derived, Monsieur Gaston Maugras is the only living author who has written about Boufflers, and, having had access to much unpublished material besides the

¹ Mr. Heinemann is shortly publishing an English translation of M. Madelin's book.

large number of original MSS. he has himself inherited, he must be regarded as the principal authority on the subject. It was absolutely necessary, therefore, for the purposes of this book, to obtain his permission to quote his works and highly desirable to consult his opinion on various points. A journey to Paris in September 1915 procured the result for which I had hoped—Monsieur Maugras, in spite of his anxiety on account of his three gallant sons now fighting in the armies of our heroic Ally, received me with the greatest kindness; he not only accorded me the permission to quote published material contained in his works and gave me valuable advice, but, with a generosity for which it is difficult to find adequate words of thanks, allowed me to make use of several unpublished MSS. and a charming picture which he was keeping for his next book. Monsieur Maugras' sympathy and encouragement have added greatly to the pleasure of my work.

I must also acknowledge my debt to the London Library, where in the valuable collection of eighteenth-century literature I was able, with the aid of the very efficient staff and by the kindness of Mr. Hagberg Wright, to find practically all the material I required.

N. H. W

March 7, 1916.

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On the cover of this book is represented the coat of arms of the de Boufflers used by all three branches of the family, but surmounted by the standards of the "colonel-général des dragons" and of the "colonel des gardes françaises" which in a letter to the Maréchal Duc de Boufflers, of January 1705, Louis XIV granted to him and all his posterity the privilege of adding to their escutcheon. (See Anselme's "Histoire généalogique de la Maison Royale de France," vol. v. p. 85.)

Coraline Daniels

THE CHEVALIER DE BOUFFLERS

BOOK I THE OLD RÉGIME

CHAPTER I

" BERGERIES "

IN the middle of the eighteenth century, when France was fast hurrying to her ruin under Louis le Bien Aimé, another Court—a Versailles in miniature—held sway on the eastern border of the kingdom. Stanislas Leczinski, the dethroned king of Poland, had triumphantly married his only child, his little " Maryczka," to the greatest *parti* in Europe, the aforesaid Louis, and was living quietly at Wissembourg in Alsace, when, as a crowning piece of good fortune, the dukedom of Lorraine was offered to him by his royal son-in-law. Henceforth the court of Lunéville became the gayest resort of the day. Here came artists, poets, painters, wits and beauties from Paris to pass pleasant days and festive nights under the hospitable roof of " le philosophe bien faisant," to wile away the hours with dancing and music, with *tric-trac* and *comète* in composing verses and making love as the mood of the moment inspired them.

Meanwhile the king did not neglect the welfare of his poorer subjects, for he built hospitals, provided for orphans, and did all in his power—a power limited by

the suzerainty of France—to relieve the oppressions from which they suffered. Essentially democratic at heart, Stanislas could not endure the absurdities of court etiquette, and banished them as far as possible from Lunéville, whilst at Commercy, the little château where the Court spent part of the summer, life was even simpler. Here every one did exactly as they liked; it was just like being at a glorious country-house full of well-chosen guests who never wished to go away.

The one exception to this pleasant rule was, however, the wife of Stanislas, Queen Catherine Opalinska, who hated Lorraine and longed perpetually for her native Poland. She was a worthy and charitable lady, but unfortunately her somewhat "dour" personality acted as a continual damper to the bounding spirits of Stanislas. Apart from her dislike for Lorraine, she had, however, a very real grievance, for, though queen in name, the real queen of Lunéville was not Catherine Opalinska, but Catherine, Marquise de Boufflers, who reigned not only over the Court but over the heart of the king.

Sixth amongst the many brilliant daughters of the Prince de Beauvau Craon, Catherine had married at the age of twenty-three the Marquis de Boufflers, grandson of the famous Maréchal de Boufflers, the defender of Lille and Namur, who had been created "duc et pair" by Louis XIV.¹ The marquis, true to his traditions, spent his life campaigning, and left his wife to keep the Court of Lunéville amused.² In this she succeeded admirably, and before long every one, from Stanislas down to his young comptroller of finances, fell under the spell of the irresistible marquise. The place she occupied in the king's affections was, however, one that had been long vacated by the poor queen. The Duchesse Ossolinska, the beautiful Comtesse Jablonowska, the Comtesse de Linanges, had each in turn held

¹ See Genealogy of the de Boufflers in Appendix, p. 420.

² The Marquis was killed in a carriage accident on February 12, 1751. He does not come into this story at all.

the monarch's wandering fancy ; but now for a year Catherine Opalinska had seen all her former rivals abandoned in favour of the young Madame de Boufflers, whom he had first met on his arrival in Lorraine.

No one more fascinating could be imagined. Though not strictly beautiful, she had nevertheless a dazzling complexion, glorious hair, and a divine figure. But her great charm lay in the fact that she was so unlike other people ! Many women of her world were gay, many attractive, but none possessed her sparkling sense of humour, her buoyant and never-failing vitality !

One spring evening, May 30, 1738, the Court assembled at Commercy for the summer were awaiting the return of Madame de Boufflers from the neighbouring town of Bar-le-duc, whither she had driven off gaily to transact some business. Her health at this moment demanded care, for her second child was shortly expected, and a serious-minded magistrate of the town had therefore been requested to escort her back. But the hour was growing late and the travellers were not yet in sight—what could have delayed their arrival ?

At last a cloud of dust was observed in the distance, which, as it rolled nearer, proved to be indeed the long-expected post-chaise moving heavily along the road ; but when finally it drew up before the steps of the Château no sprightly marquise appeared from the interior ; instead, the magistrate, a " grave and reverent seigneur," descended slowly to the ground, holding in his arms a bundle from which peeped out the tiny crumpled face of a new-born infant.

Bathed in confusion, the magistrate proceeded to explain the *contretemps* which had delayed their arrival. The post-chaise was half-way between Bar-le-duc and Commercy when Madame la Marquise became aware of the imminent arrival of the child she was expecting. No village was in sight nor any passer-by who could come to the rescue in this emergency ; there was nothing for it, therefore, but to stop the

carriage and take refuge on the grass by the roadside. . . . He himself had performed the part of *accoucheur*.¹

Little had the magistrate dreamt, when he set out with the marquise from Bar-le-duc, that he would be required to perform so strange an office ! No one who knew the lady, however, was surprised. Madame de Boufflers never could do things like other people, nor, they were destined to discover, could the baby. Who, looking down on its absurd small face that memorable spring evening, dreamt that this little son of the irresponsible marquise would be one day known to the world as the most original man of his time—the famous Chevalier de Boufflers ?

Long afterwards, when composing his own epitaph, the Chevalier described in these lines the extraordinary adventure of his birth :

" Ci-gît un chevalier qui sans cesse courut,
Qui sur les grands chemins, naquit, vécut, mourut,
Pour prouver ce que dit le sage,
Que notre vie est un voyage."

A strange journey, strangely begun, was the life of Stanislas de Boufflers !

This little incident, however, in no way interrupted the tenor of Madame de Boufflers' life ; so little impression, indeed, had it made on her that when, long afterwards, the date of the Chevalier's birth was inquired into, she could not even remember in which year it had occurred, and the baptismal register had to be consulted.² There were so many other things to occupy her attention at this moment—her books, her music, her games of *cavagnole* and *comète*, but, above all, her lovers.

The king, now nearly sixty, far from handsome and of enormous bulk, could not hope to retain the exclusive favours of the marquise. He had long since recognized in his chancellor, M. de la Galaizière, a serious rival ; but

¹ " Notice sur la vie de Boufflers," par Octave Ozanne, and " Le Chevalier de Boufflers," by Pierre de Croze in " Le Correspondant."

² " La Marquise de Boufflers et son fils le Chevalier," by Gaston Maugras, p. 267.



MME. DU CHÂTELET

he accepted the situation with all the philosophy of the day. There was also the poet Saint-Lambert, created by himself a marquis—" a great jackanapes and a very tiny genius," said Horace Walpole—with whom Madame de Boufflers acted in a pastoral play as Chloe to his Daphnis ; but of all her adorers—and they were many—the only one for whom she had any real affection was the young comptroller of finances, Monsieur Devau.

François Étienne Devau was born in 1712, one year after Madame de Boufflers, and at the age of twenty-five had already experienced a *grande passion*. The object of this youthful devotion was no other than the famous Madame de Graffigny, the friend of Voltaire and Madame de Châtelet, who, though seventeen years older than himself, returned his affection and initiated him into all the intricacies of that game of love which formed the favourite pastime of the eighteenth century. " Panpan," or " Panpichon," as his " chère Francine " christened him, learnt his lesson well, and, having recovered from his first experience, was now so well versed in the art of love-making that when he lost his heart to Madame de Boufflers he had no difficulty in holding his own even against such rivals as the king and his chancellor.

" Panpan "—for the name given him by Madame de Graffigny was soon adopted by all his friends—was one of those comfortable, selfish, sympathetic creatures so often loved by idle women. With Madame de Boufflers he was, says the *Journal de Collé*, an " animal privé "—or, as we should say to-day, a " tame cat "—and played the part of a sort of confidential butler (" une espèce de valet de chambre bel esprit,") whereby he ensured her undying affection. The bearer of a nickname is usually a loveable sort of person, and so Devau, having been the " cher Panpan " of Madame de Graffigny, became the " tendre veau " of Madame de Boufflers ; " Mon veau, mon charmant veau," we find her writing to him quite at the end of her life, long after other lovers were dead or forgotten.

Whilst Madame de Boufflers was amusing herself at Lunéville with *bergeries*—as the eighteenth century aptly described the love-affairs of the period—the baby, Stanislas, whose arrival had proved so untimely was sent away to a *nourrice* at Haroué, the country house of his grandmother the Princesse de Craon, mother of the Marquise de Boufflers.

The Princesse de Craon had led a gay youth, for she had occupied in the affections of the Duke Leopold of Lorraine the same place that her daughter now held in those of his successor Stanislas.¹ Apparently she took little notice of her new grandson, and confined her attentions to his elder brother, Charles Marc Régis, who had lived with her since his birth two years before.

As time went on little Stanislas found himself left out sadly in the cold. Charles looked on him as a baby, and refused to play with him, and he was reduced to creeping into the kennel of the big yard-dog, "Pataud," for companionship. Nobody bothered about him, but if the little boy was wanted some one would say carelessly, "Better look for him in Pataud's kennel!" and there he was almost sure to be found. In time the two friends became so inseparable that boy and dog alike were known as "Pataud," and "Pataud"—lit. "lout"—was the name under which the child destined to become the greatest wit of his day was known all through his childhood.

This pleasant friendship was at last interrupted, and the two Patauds were obliged to part, for at nine years old the boy Pataud returned to his mother at the Court of Lunéville.

Lunéville must have been an enchanting place for a small boy. King Stanislas was not unlike an Indian Rajah in his passion for mechanical devices, and the

¹ In spite of this distraction the Princesse de Craon found time to present the Prince with no less than twenty children, whilst the Duchesse Leopold became the mother of sixteen. (See "Family of the Prince de Craon" in Appendix, p. 422.)

garden of the Château was laid out at enormous expense to provide every kind of amusement. Here was a "Kiosque" in which to sit and listen to music, enlivened by clockwork figures representing the performer and at every turn one encountered cascades and fountains, sham rockwork and miniature lakes, cupolas and cottages, minarets and pagodas. Most exciting of all was the famous "Rocher," on which a life-size model of a village was erected. This too moved by clockwork, and on being wound up awoke to clamorous life—cocks crowed loudly, dogs barked, cats ran after mice, and a drunkard's wife leant out of a window and poured a pail of water on the head of her returning spouse in the most realistic manner.

Another amusement that awaited Stanislas de Boufflers on his return to Lunéville was his little sister Catherine, who had been born three years before. She was a plain child, and far from clever, but the Marquise de Boufflers was devoted to her, and would never allow her to be sent away to a *nourrice*, as her other children had been. Every one at Lunéville spoilt her too, and she was known there as "la divine mignonne." Little Stanislas was too warm-hearted to show any jealousy, and soon grew very fond of her, but it was for his mother that he kept his deepest affection.

Madame de Boufflers, at thirty-six, was still as fascinating as ever, and still as ever surrounded by admirers. Her younger son, watching her with serious dark eyes as she moved lightly about the palace in her rose-coloured satin slippers and gowns of flowered silk, as she sang to the harp or harpsichord the songs she had invented, or talked gaily, lightly, with here and there a peal of delicious laughter, thought his "belle Maman," as he called her, the most wonderful person in the world. "Her gaiety," he wrote long afterwards, "was like a perpetual spring-time in her heart that brought forth flowers to the last day of her life." (*Sa gaieté était pour son âme un printemps perpétuel qui n'a cessé*

de produire des fleurs nouvelles jusqu'à son dernier jour.)

But it was a gaiety that was never tedious, never of the tiresome chattering order ; often she would sit in silence listening to other people whilst from time to time a gleam of humour flashed in her eyes " like a bright light behind a transparent veil." How perfectly she understood the art of conversation is shown in these verses she once composed :

" Il faut dire en deux mots
Ce qu'on veut dire ;
Les longs propos
Sont sots.

" Say all you want to
In a word ;
To be long-winded
Is absurd.

" Il faut savoir lire
Avant que d'écrire,
Et puis dire en deux mots
Ce qu'on veut dire.
Les long propos
Sont sots.

" Before you write,
First learn to read,
Then in a word
Say all you need.
To be long-winded
Is absurd.

" Il ne faut pas toujours conter,
Citer,
Dater,
Mais écouter !
Il faut éviter l'emploi
Du moi, du moi,
Voici pourquoi :

" Don't always date,
Quote and relate,
But listen !
Avoid the use
Of ' I ' and ' I ,'
And this
Is why :

" Il est tyrannique,
Trop académique ;
L'ennui, l'ennui
Marche avec lui.
Je me conduis toujours ainsi
Ici,
Aussi,
J'ai réussi.

" It is tyrannical,
Too academical ;
Weariness, weariness
Lies that way.
To my creed
Then give heed !
For indeed,
I succeed.

" Il faut dire en deux mots
Ce qu'on veut dire ;
Les longs propos
Sont sots."¹

" Say all you want to
In a word ;
To be long-winded
Is absurd."

What wonder that a woman who could carry out the principles contained in these lines should be universally

¹ From " La Cour de Lunéville," by Gaston Maugras.

popular? "Écouter!"—it was this perhaps, her talent for listening, that endeared her most to her admirers, for her replies to their impassioned declarations were not always to their liking. "She exasperated her lovers more by her witticisms than by her inconstancy"—yet they continued to love her.

How soon did the boy looking on at all this realize the truth about the "belle maman" he adored?—understand the true significance of these *bergeries* in which she played so charming a part? It is impossible to know how the realization came to him, but when it did come there were only two ways in which to meet it—with disgust, or with cynical indifference—Stanislas took the latter course. There was nothing, indeed, in his early influences to give him the most elementary ideas of morality, and since, at this discovery, one must either laugh or weep, he chose to laugh—and to continue to adore his mother. Yet he was at heart strangely serious. The attention he paid to the sermons of the Père Menoux, the court chaplain, so impressed the king that he exclaimed, "The boy is a flower destined to adorn the altar!" and henceforth the question of an ecclesiastical career for "Pataud" was often discussed by his mother and the king.

Meanwhile, the abbé to whom his education was confided was the last person in the world to increase the boy's respect for the Church. "L'Abbé Porquet" was a little fragile wreck of a man, yet so full of wit and gaiety that the king and Madame de Boufflers were both delighted by him.

The first evening he was asked to say grace at the royal table disclosed his entire lack of religious knowledge.

"L'Abbé," said the king, "will you repeat the Bénédicité?"

Porquet "regretted deeply," but—he did not know

¹ Mémoires du Prince de Beauvau.

it ! Theology, he proceeded to explain later, did not interest him ; he preferred Voltaire. But the principal thing in life was to enjoy oneself ! So that there should be no misunderstanding on the subject, he once wrote quite a pretty little verse about it :

" M'amuser, n'importe comment,
Voilà toute ma philosophie,
Je crois ne perdre aucun moment,
Hors le moment où je m'ennuie :
Et je tiens ma tâche finie,
Pourvu qu'ainsi tout doucement
Je me défasse de la vie." ¹

These sentiments, needless to say, found a ready echo in the minds of Lunéville, but the king, who believed in maintaining a respect for religious observances, felt it his duty to remonstrate with Porquet when he too openly expressed his sceptical opinions.

" L'Abbé," he remarked pleasantly, " you must really moderate your views. Try to believe in the religion of which you are the apostle—I give you a year to do it in."

Many years went by without any reformation on the part of Porquet, but in spite of this King Stanislas ended by acceding to the wishes of Madame de Boufflers and creating him his almoner. In this capacity it was the duty of the abbé to read the Bible aloud to him. One evening Porquet, overcome by slumber during the performance of his office, stumbled over the words with startling results. The chapter for the day was out of Genesis, and described how God appeared in a dream to Jacob ; but instead of saying, " Dieu apparut en songe à Jacob," the sleepy abbé read aloud this surprising sentence : " Dieu apparut en *singe* à Jacob."

" What ! " cried the king in bewilderment, " surely you meant to say ' en *songe* ? ' "

But the abbé had no intention of admitting his mis-

¹ From " La Marquise de Boufflers et son fils le Chevalier," by Gaston Maugras, p. 355.

take. Drawing himself up with dignity, he replied :
" Ah, sire, with God all things are possible ! "

The possession of such a ready wit could not fail to delight Madame de Boufflers, and a laughing flirtation sprang up between them. Verses of the most daring kind flowed from the pen of the marquise, who found a new pastime in teasing the little " abbé." The beginning of a poem she once sent to him gives a strange idea of the terms she was on with her son's preceptor :

" Jadis je plus à Porquet
Et Porquet m'avait su plaire :
Il devenait plus coquet ;
Je devenais moins sévère. . . . "

It is difficult to imagine that Madame de Boufflers could ever have been very severe, and Porquet was certainly the most amusing addition to the laughing world of Lunéville. It was gayer than ever now, for poor Queen Opalinska was dead and the last restraining influence had been removed from the Court. Every evening the sound of laughter and music floated out from Madame de Boufflers' rooms into the Orangerie, and the days were spent in riding and shooting, or in acting comedies in the little theatre built by Stanislas. More and more people came from Paris and all parts of Europe to join the gay circle whence all ceremonial was banished and the whim of the moment was the only law.

One evening in February, when Stanislas de Boufflers was ten years old, a strange couple arrived at Lunéville.

Madame de Boufflers had been away on a visit, and she returned home bringing with her an odd-looking little man of about fifty-five, with sharp features and piercing eyes, who looked wretchedly ill, and a large bony woman of forty-two who was received by the King with transports of delight. These two were no other than Voltaire and his " divine Émilie," the Marquise du Châtelet.

King Stanislas, who adored genius, could not do enough honour to the philosopher, and to the authoress of a work on physics. The couple were lodged in the best

rooms of the Château, and all the *habitués* of the Court vied with each other in entertaining the distinguished guests.

Every one knows of the tragedy that followed, the infatuation of "la divine Émilie," for the young poet Saint-Lambert, who, dazzled by the attentions of the learned lady, forsook Madame de Boufflers and allowed himself to be drawn into the intrigue that had so sordid an ending.

Madame de Boufflers cared nothing for Saint-Lambert's defection, and soon after the death of Madame du Châtelet was amusing herself with another lover, the Comte de Tressan,¹ who had fled to Lunéville from the Court of Versailles, where he had incurred the displeasure of Madame de Pompadour.

De Tressan at once fell so madly in love with Madame de Boufflers that he seemed in danger of losing his reason. For two years he besieged her with burning declarations of passion. "All met," he wrote, "with coldness, abstraction, sometimes with a look of pity, but a look mingled with weariness, embarrassment, and mockery."

Baffled thus in his direct methods of attack, Tressan adopted a course curiously characteristic of the eighteenth century. Love, in this romantic age, was a malady to which every one was so liable that no one, falling a victim to it, felt it necessary to conceal the symptoms. Thus one lover would confide in another as an influenza patient might compare notes with a fellow sufferer on the stages of the disease. It was, therefore, quite natural that Tressan, tortured by the pangs of an unrequited love for Madame de Boufflers, should write to her old lover, Panpan, who, having passed that way himself, might be expected to sympathize with the sufferings of another victim to the malady.

"I cannot tell you, my dear Panpan," we find him

¹ Louis Elizabeth de la Vergne, Comte de Tressan (1705-1783), who had been brought up with Louis XV sharing his studies and amusements.

writing frantically, "all that I have endured since yesterday . . . you know, my dear Panpan, what my feelings are . . . the wildest passion has overcome me, and reflection has not yet restored my reason. . . . You must have seen for days how she has overwhelmed me with disdain, irony, and persiflage . . . endeavour, my dear Panpan, to discover her reasons. . . ." He longs to leave a kiss in her hair, to hide his aching heart in one of her little pink slippers—"dans une de ces jolies mules couleur de roses quoique je ne suis pas sûr cependant qu'il put s'y loger."¹

Apparently, however, the lady was not always cruel, for the letters convey hints of visits paid by her to his garden in Toul, where every flower reminds him agonizingly of her presence; and there were happy hours, too, when, seated by her harpsichord, the "divine warbler" (la divine fauvette), as he called her, sang to him alone.

"Farewell, queen of my thoughts, of my heart and of my reason . . .," he ends one of his letters to her; "believe me that I am, and only wish to be, what you desire, to adore without displeasing you, and to occupy only a few moments of your life. I kiss your right hand with respect. . . . I kiss, too, that poor little left hand that hovers so bravely over double octaves. Confess that I am very magnanimous to kiss those naughty little hands after the tricks that they have played on me. Ah! if I dared I would kiss . . .," etc., etc.¹

It is not surprising that if Madame de Boufflers received many effusions of this kind they should be met with the "persiflage" and "air of abstraction" of which Tressan complained in his letter to Panpan. Yet, though she could never resist laughing at her lovers, Madame de Boufflers was fundamentally the most good-natured woman in the world, and her kindness usually healed the wounds her mockery had caused.

We do not know how the affair of Tressan ended, but his letters to Panpan four years later convey no longer

¹ "La Mère du Chevalier de Boufflers," by E. Meaume.

the impression of unrequited love, and it is probable that he enjoyed the same favour as her other lovers. Madame de Boufflers was the incarnation of her age, the age that at the same time repels and fascinates. Voltaire and the so-called philosophers of the eighteenth century had undermined all belief in a hereafter, and the gay world danced with smiling indifference towards the abyss of nothingness—the "néant"—^{*}that they believed awaited them. It is said that Madame de Boufflers adopted as her own the epitaph composed by the Comtesse de Verrue, summing up in a word her own philosophy of life :

" Ci-gît, dans une paix profonde
Cette dame de volupté
Qui, pour plus grande sûreté,
Fit son Paradis en ce monde "

*Here lies in profound peace
That lady of voluptuousness
Who for greater security
Made her Paradise in this world.*

** Nothingness.*

CHAPTER II

" A GOOD DEVIL, BUT A BAD SAINT "

WHILST his mother was amusing herself with " *bergeries* " Stanislas de Boufflers was leading a riotous youth under the care of the Abbé Porquet. In spite of his reputation for infant piety, the son of the " *Dame de Volupté* " had inherited strong passions and a spirit of adventure that, as the years went on, led him into all kinds of escapades. But in the eighteenth century a prelate had little need to cultivate austerity, and his behaviour appeared to no one at Lunéville an obstacle to his entering the Church as the king and his mother had arranged. Madame de Boufflers had only a small fortune of her own, and so little had she used her power over the king to enrich herself that Voltaire tells us " she had hardly the wherewithal to buy herself petticoats." Charles, her elder son (now the Marquis de Boufflers in consequence of his father's death), having followed the profession of his ancestors, the family resources were needed to defray his expenses in the army, and therefore some more remunerative employment must be found for Stanislas. The Church, with such powerful influence as the king's at his back, was obviously the shortest road to fame and to fortune, and so, regardless of the boy's glaring unfitness for an ecclesiastical career, the livings of Longeville and Béchamp were bestowed on him, and he became known to the world under the solemn title of the " Abbé de Boufflers."

Henceforth this strange abbé of eighteen was to be seen riding joyously to hounds, acting, dancing, singing, and composing ribald verses in the intervals of theo-

logical studies. Porquet, far from exercising any sobering influence over his pupil, became his boon companion, and the two abbés "rhymed together on woman, love, and folly."

Boufflers' talent for making verses provoked so much admiration at Lunéville that when he was only twenty it was decided to make him a member of the "Académie de Nancy," and, since Porquet must not be left out, both abbés were received there on the same day.

Nobody, of course, saw any irony in the address made to Boufflers on this occasion.

"Until now," the President remarked solemnly, "you have devoted yourself to the study of sacred books and theology, because you were born to enlighten vast dioceses and to be placed hereafter amongst the foremost pillars of the Church . . ."!

What must have been the feelings of the young abbé on hearing this exhortation? From the first he had never shown the least inclination to the calling chosen for him; no one more than he detested humbug, and as time went on he grew more and more to dread the thought of taking vows.

At last, one dreadful day, his mother told him that the time had come for him to go to Paris and enter Saint-Sulpice as a seminarist. Stanislas heard these words with dismay. He could not bear the idea of leaving Lunéville and the smiling hills of Lorraine. He thought of the glorious days spent in the chase across country on his English hunters, and with a sinking heart he felt the grim walls of Saint-Sulpice closing round him, shutting out the free outdoor life he loved. But in vain he begged Madame de Boufflers to change her mind and allow him to become a soldier like his father and brother, assuring her that he had no vocation for the priesthood; his mother only replied impatiently that he was a dreamer—what did he want with a vocation, when other priests got on so well without one? And though at last he threw himself at her feet and implored her to

reconsider her decision, nothing would move Madame de Boufflers ; she only told him not to weary her with more discussion ; he must go into the Church, and there was an end of it.¹

In desperation Stanislas sought the king and put his case before him. The old man, who was really fond of young Boufflers, showed no impatience, and listened sympathetically to all he had to say, but he would not reverse Madame de Boufflers' decision. He told him to be reasonable and to do what his mother wished ; all would be for the best. " We have great hopes for you," he ended kindly ; " I will do everything in my power for you, and help you to attain the highest places in the Church."

" I care nothing for advancement," Stanislas answered sadly ; " ambition has no place in my heart."

" What ? You would not care to be one day a great prelate—perhaps a cardinal ? "

" I would rather be happy than great."

The king understood this. He was at heart a simple soul, and could enter into the boy's feelings. Still, it was impossible to oppose Madame de Boufflers. So a few weeks later Boufflers, with despair in his heart, bade farewell to his mother and the " divine mignonne," to kind old Stanislas, to his friends Panpan and Porquet, and, last but not least, to his English hunters, and set forth on the long road to Paris.

Long afterwards, looking back on the world he left that day behind him, he wrote : " When I think of that Court of Lunéville I seem to be remembering the pages of a novel rather than years of my own life."

His heart sank still lower when he arrived at his destination and found himself within the gloomy precincts of the Saint-Sulpice under the vigilant eyes of the Père Couthurier and the pious priests of the seminary. No more for young de Boufflers the pleasures of the chase, nights of revelry, laughter, love, and song !

¹ " La Cour de Lunéville, dernières années," by Gaston Maugras.

But the depression that filled him on arrival did not last long, and his wild spirits soon came to the rescue. His career at Saint-Sulpice was, in fact, a series of outbreaks against discipline, and before many weeks had sped he was gaily filling up the *bénitiers* with ink wherewith the unsuspecting brothers adorned their foreheads, and enlivening discourses by his really remarkable talent for imitating the sounds of a farmyard. There were plenty of amusing people to welcome him in Paris—amongst them his mother's brother, the Prince de Beauvau, her sisters the Maréchale de Mirepoix and the abbess of Saint-Antoine,¹ and her aunt the Maréchale de Luxembourg (once the Duchesse de Boufflers), of whom much more anon.

The Marquise de Boufflers had often stayed in Paris, and indeed held an honorary post as lady-in-waiting to the king's old sisters, so she had many friends, who were all delighted to welcome the young seminarist. The trouble was that the rules of Saint-Sulpice forbade unlimited liberty, and Boufflers was obliged to refuse most of the invitations he received. Filled with indignation at this severity, he wrote home hastily to his mother: "I have just heard a frightful thing! I am only to be allowed out twice a month instead of twice a week, and then I must be in by five o'clock!"

It was agreed at Lunéville that this was intolerable, and a letter from Stanislas to the Père Couthurier had the desired effect of relaxing discipline in the case of the rebellious abbé.

Another hardship, however, awaited him at Saint-Sulpice. Boufflers, accustomed to the delicacies of the royal table, found the diet of the seminary all too meagre, and, being possessed of a healthy appetite, would have fared badly but for the kindness of his friends, who kept

¹ Gabrielle de Beauvau, abbess of the royal "abbaye" de la Rue Saint-Antoine. "Le Chevalier de Boufflers, son neveu, disait toujours qu'elle était la personne la plus naturellement spirituelle et la plus naïvement piquante qu'il eût jamais connue." ("Mémoires de la Marquise de Créquy," vol. ii. p. 133.)

* Her nephew always said that she was a person with more natural spirituality and more innocent piquancy than anyone he ever knew.

him supplied with good things. These he consumed in the privacy of his cell, and wrote charming verses in return.

In a letter to his aunt, the Maréchale de Mirepoix, he describes amusingly one of these surreptitious banquets :

“ I must beg you, Madame la Maréchale, to pay yourself my compliments, to assure yourself of my respect, to ask yourself whether you are well, whether you had a good journey, and whether you are not very tired. . . . I have just been obliged to leave you for a moment in order to lunch on half a pie that the Princesse de Chimay ¹ sent me ; from it I have derived invincible courage wherewith to brave the diet of the seminary, and laid up a store of sobriety for the whole day. Madame du Deffand sent me lately two excellent cold partridges. . . . Monsieur le Président ² sent me a tongue much better suited to the seminary than my own, for it is stuffed, and I am glad of it, as thus it is not in a condition to tell Monsieur Couthurier about my behaviour. . . . You see, from the account I have given you of my provisions and my verses, that my room is half Parnassus and half larder, and he who inhabits it is half poet and half ogre—but more ogre than poet ! There, my dear aunt !—give my respects to my grandmother and kiss yourself from me on the forehead in the looking-glass—I hear a bell ring, so I take my surplice and hood and fly to service. . . . If I am scolded I shall say it was you who kept me ! Good-bye—Good-bye ! ”

The Maréchale de Mirepoix, to whom these compliments were addressed, was the elder sister of the Marquise de Boufflers. As Anne Marguerite Gabrielle de Beauvau Craon, she had first married the Prince de Lixin, who was killed in a duel with the Duc de Richelieu, and after his death she made one of the few love marriages of the period, the object of her affections being the Maréchal de Mirepoix—“ a hard, polite, dry, and civil man,” says Horace Walpole, whom his wife, however, contrived to adore. She had, unhappily, another and

¹ The Prince de Chimay was Boufflers' first cousin.

² The President Henault, one of Madame du Deffand's many lovers.

less admirable passion, and this was for gambling. "Madame de Mirepoix," Walpole observes, "is *the* agreeable woman of the world, when she pleases—but there must not be a card in the room." It was the besetting vice that ran through all her family, and that proved disastrous later on, as we shall see, both to the Marquise de Boufflers and her son the Chevalier.

But Madame de Mirepoix allowed her passion to lead her into depths never reached by her more irresponsible sister. Desperate to recoup herself and to cover her continual losses, she was reduced to befriending the King's favourites, first Madame de Pompadour and later Madame du Barry, thereby securing the aid of the royal purse to help her out of difficulties.

It was probably through Madame de Mirepoix that young de Boufflers made the acquaintance of the woman who was helping to ruin France. Soon after his arrival at Saint-Sulpice we find him riding constantly along the road to Versailles on a "great devil of a horse" and dismounting at the wonderful house next door to the Château where, amidst all that was most exquisite in the art of France, sat that amazing woman, her cheeks wasting beneath their rouge, her eyes bright with fever—Madame de Pompadour, nearing the end of her short and evil life. Yet behind the wreckage of her beauty her intellect was as alert as ever; though her charms had long since ceased to appeal to his senses, her mind still held sway over the feeble brain of the king; she was still able to amuse him, able by means of ceaseless effort to dispel his perpetual *ennui*.

Like many another woman who has lost the power to charm, she had now taken up a "cause." In the *entresol* of the Château she had secured a lodging for the "docteur Quesnay," and here, in the intervals of wheedling money and privileges out of the man who had raised her from obscurity to the place of power she occupied, she would find her way surreptitiously to join the crowd of social reformers that the doctor

collected around him. "This little *entresol*, the rendezvous of the boldest innovators, of the most determined *esprits forts*, of the most ardent materialists, was the secret laboratory of the coming Revolution, of disorder and destruction. To be met there—talking, dining, declaiming, conspiring together were such men as d'Alembert, the chief of the Encyclopédists, Duclos, who said of the great nobles by whom he was flattered : ' They fear us as thieves fear street-lamps. . . . ' Rugged democrats in appearance, compliant in reality, eating with pride the good dinners of the great ones of the earth whose so-called dignity makes them smile ! . . . " ¹

It was characteristic of such democrats to choose the King's own palace for their meeting-place, and the King's favourite for their presiding genius. Yet they knew, these so-called friends of the people, that the miseries the people suffered were owing to this woman in a greater degree than to any other cause. When, in 1750, the Revolution nearly broke out, the insults of the populace were all directed against Madame de Pompadour.

" We are dying of hunger ! " cried the fishwives surrounding the carriage of the Dauphin as he crossed the bridge of La Tournelle. A few louis were distributed amongst them. But the cries broke out anew : " Mon-seigneur, we do not want your money ; it is bread we need. We love you well—but send away the miserable woman who is ruling the kingdom and causing us to perish. If we could catch her there would soon be little left of her ! " And indeed Madame de Pompadour, venturing incautiously into Paris, was obliged to fly for her life to avoid being torn to pieces. The enraged people, baffled of their prey, threatened to march on Versailles and burn down the Château. Alas for popular justice ! the march was delayed thirty-nine years longer, and another woman, innocent of wrongs towards the nation, suffered in her stead.

• But of all this Stanislas de Boufflers probably guessed

¹ " La Cour de Louis XV," by Imbert de Saint-Amand, p. 242.

nothing. Very young and generous-minded men are easily deceived by clever women with a chequered past behind them, and to the boy of twenty-three this brilliant woman of forty doubtless appeared a divinity. Accustomed from his youth to the most flagrant immorality, her position at the Court must have seemed to him quite natural, and she was skilful enough to pose as an advocate for the rights of the people, thereby appealing to that passionate love of humanity which lay at the bottom of his nature. He saw on one side the degraded Court, the weak and self-indulgent King, and on the other a band of reformers whose rugged speech and plain manners distinguished them from the false and polished courtiers, who discussed marvellous schemes of legislation by which a model state should be evolved out of the existing chaos.

At this period of his life, however, Boufflers was incapable of taking anything seriously for long, and as time went on he threw himself more and more into dissipation. Everything conspired to make him reckless—the wild blood that ran in his veins, the disastrous influences of his youth, and now the restraints of the seminary, which served only to whet his appetite for pleasure. When he *did* get out his pent-up spirits were apt to carry him away completely. Thus at the Prince de Conti's country house—"L'Isle Adam"—his behaviour led him into sad disgrace.

It was impossible, Boufflers had written home rapturously, to give an idea of the delights of "L'Isle Adam." "We are here in battalions . . . and there are pretty women by the dozen. I could imagine myself at the *salon* where everything enchants the eye but nothing holds it, so I have made up my mind to love every one at once."

At supper the pleasure of the day reached its height. In the eighteenth century supper-parties often turned into revels, and ended up with songs of a ribald kind. One evening, when the mirth ran high and champagne

flowed too freely, Boufflers, excited by wine and merriment, gave vent to an impromptu song even more daring than the rest, which reached the ears of the Dauphin¹ and brought him a severe reprimand from Court.

"I was unanimously condemned," he wrote with shame to the Abbé Porquet, "and unfortunately with justice."

Yet even this experience did not teach the irrepressible abbé to restrain his muse, for soon after we find him busily engaged on literary work in his cell. A theological treatise, no doubt? Alas, nothing of the kind!

In a few weeks the salons of Paris were startled by the appearance of a short story entitled, "Aline, Reine de Golconde," which told in really graceful language how a little milkmaid, by the exercise of her charms, rose to be queen of Golconda. The pastoral ending to this licentious tale is characteristic of Boufflers' whimsical turn of mind. The author, having described his encounters with his adored Aline at various stages of her triumphal career, explains that he has now retired to a desert to end his life in solitude:

"My reader has perhaps believed till now that it was to him I was telling this story, but, as he never asked me to do so, he will think it only natural that it should be addressed to a little old woman dressed in palm-leaves who has long inhabited the desert to which I have retired and had asked me to recount my most interesting adventures to her."

Needless to say, the little old woman turns out to be no other than Aline herself:

"'What! is it you again?' I cried. 'I must be very old, for, if I remember rightly, I am one year older than you; but it is impossible to be one year older than your face!'

"'What do our age or our faces matter?' she answered gravely. 'Once we were young and handsome; let us now be wise, and we shall be happier. . . .'

"Then she led me towards a high mountain covered

¹ Father of Louis XVI.

with fruit-trees of different kinds ; a stream of clear and sparkling water ran in and out from the summit. . . .

" 'Look,' she said, 'is not that enough for your happiness ? This is my abode ; it can be yours too if you wish. . . .'

"I fell at the feet of the divine Aline, filled with admiration for her and of contempt for myself ; we loved each other more than ever, and became the universe to one another. I have already passed many delightful years with this wise companion ; I have left my wild passions and all my prejudices behind in the world ; my arms have become more industrious, my mind profounder, my heart more feeling. Aline has taught me to find a charm in gentle labour, in pleasant thoughts and tender feelings, and it is only at the end of my days that I have begun to live !" (Ce n'est qu'à la fin de mes jours que j'ai commencé à vivre !)

The story of Aline is, of course, frankly pagan in its morality, and, to the cynical mind of the eighteenth century, it acquired an additional piquancy when it was discovered to be the work of the young seminarist—Stanislas de Boufflers.

"For six months 'Aline' was the rage. Innumerable copies passed from *salon* to *salon*, from boudoir to boudoir, from one set to another ; people fought for the manuscripts, they talked of nothing but the story and its author. Boufflers had a vogue he had never sought, and which for that reason was all the greater, and landed him straight away in the domain of gallantry. Every woman wanted to know the happy lover of the milkmaid, the simple and charming writer who by the freshness and pretty turn of his phrases had been able to excite the curiosity of a public wearied by the dulness of so many little novels. Dowagers had this *bagatelle* read out to them, and smiled as they applauded. At Versailles the whole Court was under the spell, and Madame de Pompadour took so keen an interest in reading 'Aline,' and retained such a favourable impression of it, that, according to Bachaumont, she conceived the idea of the little rustic farm and gardens of the Petit Trianon. She wanted to keep cows and milk

them herself, to dress up in the corselet and white petticoat of Aline and in this coquettish disguise to fascinate afresh her royal and inconstant lover."¹

For the modern mind it is difficult to understand the extraordinary success of "Aline." It is too irresponsible to shock us—for no one could take its morality seriously, and there is not a coarse word from beginning to end—but the impression left on the mind is of a rather charming absurdity. One must understand, however, the mind of the eighteenth century to appreciate its novelty. Artificiality had been so long the order of the day, stilted romances crammed with classical allusions, that Boufflers' little story was like a sudden getting back to Nature for these hothouse brains. His charming descriptions of fields and streams and of the "simple life," though commonplaces to us, were entirely new to them, and thrilled them with all the joy of a discovery. Boufflers was indeed a revelation to his age, for he dared to be perfectly natural. It was this that made the charm of his personality, and distinguished him from the puppet men of the *salons*. He never achieved anything really great in literature, but his verses have a whimsicality, an original turn to be found in no others of the period. "How can one seriously discuss the style of the Chevalier de Boufflers, since it consists in being without one?" wrote the Prince de Ligne. "He never wrote verses for the sake of writing them, but he seized on the point, the salt, the right word, the piquant and funny side of things in the society verses of which he was the god. How can any one compare him with Voiture, stilted, involved, dry, cold, and hard—he, with his charming carelessness, with gaiety in every verse, with his witty silliness and his good taste amidst the bad taste underlying it? In a word, he has his own way of saying things, and he says nothing but what he wants to say."

There was a further point about Boufflers usually

¹ "Notice sur la vie de Boufflers," by Octave Uzanne.

overlooked by his critics—the strange seriousness that lay behind all his folly. The buffoon who is only a buffoon soon becomes wearisome; the true humorist has almost invariably an underlying current of gravity, sometimes even of melancholy. Boufflers was no exception to this rule. Underneath all his fooling, through all his amorous adventures and his life as wit and man of fashion, as actor, poet, soldier, explorer, the same dream of a truer, simpler life pursued him—the life that but half mockingly he described at the end of "Aline": "Ce n'est qu'à la fin de mes jours que j'ai commencé à vivre."

These concluding words, as we shall see, proved strangely prophetic of his future.

The publication of "Aline, Reine de Golconde," settled, however, Boufflers' career. The story having been deliberated over by the authorities at Saint-Sulpice, the impious abbé was summoned and informed that grave doubts were entertained as to his vocation. Boufflers, always frank, heartily concurred with the opinion of his superiors.

"Nothing," he said fervently, "is further from my thoughts than the desire to become an ecclesiastic. Of course I have no vocation. I would far rather follow the calling of my ancestors, and be a soldier."

To this reply there was nothing to be said, and the Père Couthurier was faced with the unpleasant duty of informing Boufflers' relations that he must leave the seminary.

But the young abbé saved him any trouble in the matter by taking the law into his own hands. Without saying a word to any one, he watched his opportunity, and one day, when the holy brothers were engaged at prayer or meditation and the precincts were deserted, he hurried to his cell, slipped out of the hated cassock, tore off his hood, and crept out of the gate into the street.

Oh the joy of that moment! The gloomy portals of Saint-Sulpice behind him, the blue sky overhead, and

the great world of excitement and of adventure before him. He was free once more—free to make love and enjoy life like other men, without the shadow of the priesthood hanging over him; and, as usual, he found a vent for his spirits by bursting into rhyme:

"J'ai quitté ma soutane
Malgré tous mes parents;
Je veux que Dieu me damne
Si jamais je la prends.
Eh! mais oui dà,
Comment peut-on trouver du mal à ça?
Eh! mais oui dà,
Se fera prêtre qui voudra.

"J'aime mieux mon Annette
Que mon bonnet carré,
Que ma noire jaquette
Et mon rabat moiré.
Eh! mais oui dà,
Comment peut-on trouver du mal à ça?
Eh! mais oui dà,
Se fera prêtre qui voudra."

Yet, after giving vent to this ribald outburst, we find the extraordinary ex-abbé sitting down to write a letter of immense length to Porquet describing with the gravity of an elderly philosopher his exact reasons for changing his profession.

"Well, my dear abbé, here am I on the point of carrying out a project to which my humour has always inclined and which your reason has always blamed—that of changing my calling. It is no light thing to begin a new life, so to speak, at twenty-four; and perhaps you will tell me that I ought to think it over more seriously than my age or my light-heartedness enables me to do; but do not condemn me without having heard me out one last time; and since, in the matter of happiness, the only true judges are the interested parties, let me plead and sum up my own case.

"I was on the road to fortune; the first steps I made on it sufficed to show me this. The most favourable circumstances seemed to conspire in presenting a brilliant future to my imagination. I could, without merit, have obtained—like so many others—certain

privileges ; by means of a little hypocrisy I should probably have become a bishop ; perhaps, by a little knavery, a cardinal ; who knows but that a few more artifices and intrigues might not have placed me at the head of the Church ? But I would rather be aide-de-camp in the Soubise army : 'Trahit sua quemque voluptas.' The first rule for conduct is not to become rich and powerful, but to know one's true desires and follow them. Alexander, with the gold of Asia in his coffers and the sceptre of the universe in his hands, sought happiness in Babylon, and a little shepherd boy will find it in his own village if he wins for his wife the little peasant girl he loves.

" But to leave Alexander and return to myself (for I am much more like the shepherd boy than I am like Alexander), you know that the three principal traits in my character are hot blood, thoughtlessness, and independence. Compare such a character with the duties of the calling I had adopted and tell me whether you think I was fitted for it. You know how impossible it is for me, but how important it is for an ecclesiastic, to conceal all his desires, to disguise all his thoughts, to be careful of all he says, and to avoid drawing attention to all he does. Think of the bitter hatreds, the black jealousies, the miserable perfidies, that reign even more in the hearts of priests than of other men, and then of the hold that my frankness, my want of discretion, my levity, in fact, would have given over me ; you will admit that I was not made to live amongst those sort of people. Infer then, dear abbé, from my long letter, and still more from the long time we have lived together, that I may, as often happens, be carried away from my duties by my levity, by the gaiety of youth, by the force of my passions, but I will die rather than cease to be honest ! "

This was Boufflers at his best ; all his life he hated hypocrisy. Nearly twenty years later we find him writing the same thing in briefer language : " J'aime mieux être bon diable que mauvais saint ! " And this sentence may be taken as an epitome of his reasons for leaving Saint-Sulpice.

CHAPTER III

"MONSIEUR CHARLES"

THE doors of the seminary having closed behind him, Stanislas de Boufflers lost no time in embarking on his new career. The Seven Years War was not yet ended, and so there was still a chance of glory for a boy with the fighting blood of the de Boufflers rioting in his veins. Through the influence of his uncle, the Prince de Beauvau, he succeeded in getting a commission in the army of the Prince de Soubise, now engaged on a campaign in Hesse. At the same time he was created a Chevalier de Malte (Knight of Malta), an order that was both religious and military, and conferred on him the strange privilege of being allowed to attend mass with a surplice worn over his uniform. A more tangible advantage lay, however, in the fact that, as Chevalier de Malte, he was able to draw his revenues from the livings conferred on him by Stanislas, whilst renouncing all his vows except that of celibacy, a detail that at this period of his life did not trouble him at all, though, as we shall see, its consequences were destined to be far-reaching. And so Boufflers—henceforth to become famous as the Chevalier de Boufflers—set forth gaily to the war. How glorious to exchange the "great devil of a horse" that had carried the unwilling seminarian through the streets of Paris for the splendid chargers—named by him "Le Prince Ferdinand" and "Le Prince Héréditaire," after two generals in the enemy's army—now owned by this gallant captain of hussars!

With a song on his lips the Chevalier rode into the fiercest battles, and, returning to camp, laid aside his sword to write love-poems to the ladies he had left behind in Paris, or to delight his companions with his *bons mots* and his verses.

No less than his gallant ancestors did our Chevalier show himself worthy of his traditions, and at the end of the war the great-grandson of the defender of Lille returned to Lunéville with a splendid record for valour.

With the signing of the peace of Hubertville in 1763 the military career of Boufflers came temporarily to an end, and once more he found himself with no adequate outlet for his energies. The life at Lunéville soon failed to satisfy the man who was described as "le plus errant des chevaliers," and to satisfy his roving nature Stanislas from time to time sent the Chevalier on diplomatic missions, in which pursuit his ready wit might be expected to stand him in good stead. It proved occasionally too ready, as in the case of his visit to the Princess Christine of Saxony. This princess, the daughter of Frederick Augustus, Elector of Saxony, and sister to the Dauphine of France, had just been made abbess of the convent of Remiremont, and Stanislas felt it incumbent on him to send her his congratulations on the event. The Chevalier de Boufflers, having been chosen as his emissary, no doubt looked forward to an amusing visit, for Remiremont was one of the gayest convents of the day, and the rendezvous of many pleasant people.

Unfortunately, on the journey he caught a chill which resulted in a badly swollen cheek. Now Boufflers at his best was never strictly handsome, and this ill-timed excrescence certainly did not improve his appearance. Whether the princess considered the luckless Chevalier guilty of some form of *lèse-majesté* in having permitted his cheek to swell before entering her presence, or whether she had some other cause for annoyance, history does not relate ; we only know that the Prin-

cess Christine—a homely German with the opulent charms of her race—received him with marked coldness. This was too much for Boufflers, accustomed to be made much of by the great world, and as he made his way homewards he could not refrain from giving vent to his feelings by his fatal passion for rhyming. His version of the incident is given in a poem of which the two first verses are as follows :

" Enivré du brillant poste
Que j'occupe en ce moment,
Dans une chaise de poste
Je me campe fièrement,
Et je vais en ambassade,
Au nom de mon souverain,
Dire que je suis malade
Et que lui se porte bien.

" Avec une joue enflée,
Je débarque tout honteux :
La princesse boursouflée,
Au lieu d'une, en avait deux ;
Et son Altesse sauvage
Sans doute a trouvé mauvais
Que j'eusse sur mon visage
La moitié de ses attraits."

These irreverent verses convulsed Lunéville, but having been read by the Comte de Lusace, brother of "the puffy princess"—"la princesse boursouflée"—they finally reached the Dauphine and the Chevalier found himself once more in disgrace at the Court of France.

King Stanislas, however, undaunted by the fiasco of Boufflers' first venture as a diplomat, continued to employ him as envoy, and sent him to congratulate the Archduke Joseph (son of the last Duke of Lorraine) on his election as King of the Romans. This time the Chevalier acquitted himself well, and his letters to Lunéville describing the ceremonies that took place at Frankfort contained no further sarcasms about royal personages.

Yet Boufflers had not the makings of a courtier ; his

sense of the ridiculous was bound to assert itself at the wrong moment, and the impulsiveness which he recognized as one of his salient characteristics was no less fatal to his success at the Courts of Europe than it would have been to his advancement in the Church.

When, in the autumn of 1764, no other diplomatic mission was forthcoming, it occurred to the Chevalier to set forth on his travels for his own pleasure.

Now at this moment, Voltaire, having quarrelled finally with Frederick the Great, was living in retirement at Ferney; but the great world was not long in following him into his retreat, and it became the fashion for the *esprits forts* of the day—both men and women—to make pilgrimages to the shrine of their idol.

Madame de Genlis, in the course of an amusing description of her own visit to the great philosopher at whose doctrines she had always professed to be shocked, was obliged to admire his philanthropy :

"He took us through the village to see the houses he had built and the benevolent institutions he had made. There he is greater than in his books; for kindly thought is everywhere to be seen, and one can hardly believe that the hand which penned so much impiety, falsehood, and wickedness should have done things so noble, wise, and useful."

This was the Voltaire that appealed to the imagination of the Chevalier de Boufflers, the Voltaire he could remember on that memorable visit to Lunéville in his childhood as one of his mother's most fervent admirers, and he started for Ferney to renew his acquaintance with the philosopher. This time he did not "set forth proudly in a postchaise," but humbly and "incognito" as the impecunious artist "Monsieur Charles" visiting Switzerland in the exercise of his profession. Already the "Chevalier de Boufflers" was well known to the world, and only by concealing his identity would

he be able to mix with the people at his ease and study the life of the country through which he passed. Boufflers' chief interest in life was always humanity, and the cause of humanity the one purpose that fired his imagination. His visit to Switzerland was therefore a revelation to him, for it was his first sight of a free and happy country.

France at this period was at its lowest ebb of misery. The peasants were ground down by taxes—*corvées*, *tailles*, and *gabelles*—whilst the nobles and the clergy were exempt from taxation. A more monstrously unjust state of affairs it is impossible to imagine—no wonder that it roused the indignation of the large-hearted Chevalier, and that the sight of the happy Swiss peasants filled him with passionate regret for the miseries of France.

The "Lettres de la Suisse"¹ that he wrote to his mother, and which afterwards became so famous, are not merely charming as descriptions of the scenery, but interesting as showing the growth of democracy in the mind of a young man belonging to a country where at this period the rights of man were still only dreamt of, and whose sole experience of life was confined to Courts and the society of the rich and frivolous. The example of Stanislas le Bienfaisant had doubtless not been without its effect, but Boufflers was a natural humanitarian; no extraneous influences were needed to bring him to a realization of the injustices of human life. He went about the world on his own account, observing, studying, and drawing his conclusions, which are delightfully recorded in the letters from Switzerland. Their literary merit may not be so high as his contemporaries believed, but they are so simple, so natural, and so curiously modern in their style that they are

¹ All the letters quoted in this chapter are taken from the "Œuvres de Stanislas de Boufflers" (Briand, Paris, 1813). They have been published several times. In the British Museum there is a copy that belonged to Horace Walpole, and is marked throughout by Walpole's hand.

well worth reading through. A further interesting point is the modernity of the descriptions they contain—they might, indeed, be dated 1915 instead of 1764, so exactly do they coincide with the social conditions of the same country to-day.

Switzerland has been undoubtedly, all through its history, the model democracy of the world; nowhere are the inequalities of birth or fortune so little apparent as in that happy country. The Chevalier de Boufflers in one sentence puts his finger on that point in Swiss human nature which, even more than its excellent schemes of government, has contributed to its prosperity.

"The Swiss and French people," he wrote from Geneva, "are like two gardeners, of which one cultivates cabbages, the other flowers." There we have it in a word! A democratic government must be above all things utilitarian, and to a large extent material—the population for which it legislates must all be content not merely to work, but to make work the primary object of life and amusement its accessory.

But if the Swiss are content to cultivate cabbages, they are not without flowers all the same: Nature provides them! Nature, in giving it enchanting lakes and mountains, serene skies and glorious sunshine, has laid out this little country as a pleasure-garden where the planters of cabbages can take their ease and enjoy their leisure moments.

The Chevalier de Boufflers, watching these contented gardeners at work, was filled with interest and admiration.

"This country," he wrote to his mother, "is not so fertile as France, but the soil is cultivated by free hands. The men sow for themselves, and do not reap for others. The horses do not see four-fifths of their corn eaten by kings. . . . The peasants are tall and strong, the peasant women strong and handsome. . . . This nation does not amuse itself much, but it employs

its time well. Here men are industrious because work is a pleasure, for they are certain to secure the profit ; it is as pleasant to till the ground as to reap. The laws of the Swiss are severe ; but they have the pleasure of making them themselves, and he who is hanged for breaking them has the pleasure of seeing himself obeyed by the executioner. . . . Remind the king that in the freest country in the world there is at this moment the most faithful of his subjects, and you—sing to yourself from me : ‘ Love me as I love you.’ ”

The democratic spirit of Switzerland delighted the young man who had proved so unsuccessful as a courtier :

“ Here I am in the charming Pays de Vaud, on the edge of the Lake of Geneva, bordered on one side by the mountains of Valais and Savoie and on the other by superb vineyards where the vintage is now in progress. The grapes are enormous and excellent ; they grow from the edge of the lake right up to the top of Mount Jura, so that at one glance I can see grape-gatherers with their feet in the water and others perched high up on the rocks almost out of sight. The Lake of Geneva is a thing of beauty ! It is as if the Ocean had given Switzerland its portrait in a miniature. . . .

“ The most interesting thing of all is the simplicity of manners in the town of Vevai. I am only known there as a painter, yet am treated everywhere as I am at Nancy—I go into all kinds of society, I am listened to and admired by many people who have a great deal more sense than I have myself, and am shown civilities I should only expect in Lorraine.

“ The Golden Age still exists for these people. It is not worth while to be a noble lord [*grand seigneur*] in order to associate with them ; it is enough to be a man. Humanity, with these good folks, is all that kinship would be with others.”

This appreciation of the dignity of human nature apart from the accidents of birth or fortune, this

detestation of snobbery which made life at Courts unendurable to the Chevalier, runs through all his writings. No wonder that, as time went on, he allowed himself to be enticed by the mirage of "equality," of the "equal rights of man" that danced perpetually before the eyes of the generous-minded men of his day. For them, too, the Golden Age was to dawn, the day when tyranny should be abolished and every man should be free and happy. Alas for all the high hopes that perished in the great disillusionment the terrible future held for them! But the Chevalier, as yet, did not dream of revolutions. "Place me at the king's feet," he ends a letter to his mother, "and tell him that the sight of a free people will never lead me to rebellion. Adieu, maman; I love you wherever I am, wherever you are."

The Chevalier tells his mother gaily of all his adventures, his joy at having made a humble pair happy by painting the portrait of the wife for the husband and refusing the payment the good people pressed on him; of his delight in discovering that even in austere Switzerland "*la femme est toujours femme. Non seulement la femme y est femme, mais elle est belle.*" Even as the impecunious painter. "Monsieur Charles," it is evident that the gallant Chevalier excelled in the game of love. "Out of thirty or forty girls or women," he writes to his mother again from Vevai, "there are not four ugly ones, and not one wanton. Oh the good and bad country!" The letter ends characteristically:

"Farewell, madame; here is a long letter, but if I added to it all the adoration that I feel for you, you would die of boredom. Place me at the king's feet, tell him of my follies, and announce the arrival of one of my letters to him in which I would rather be disrespectful than dull. Princes need to be amused more than adored. God alone has a deep enough fund of humour not to be bored by all the homages addressed to Him." (*Il n'y a que Dieu qui ait un assez grand*

fonds de gaieté pour ne pas s'ennuyer de tous les hommages qu'on lui rend.)

From Vevai "Monsieur Charles" made his way to Lausanne, at that date the pleasantest social centre of the country. Here lived most of the old aristocratic families, who composed a set of their own; but the lively element was to be found amongst the young people of the university—adepts in the eighteenth-century art of mingling study with frivolity. There were literary debates for discussing questions of history or philosophy, societies for essay writing, but there were always plenty of amusements—dancing and parties in winter, games and excursions in summer. At these pursuits the students were joined by a joyous band of young girls calling themselves the "Society of Spring," and who appear to have been the last word in modernity as we understand it in England to-day.

Gibbon, then a young man, who spent some years at Lausanne—where he fell in love with the learned Mademoiselle Suzanne Curchod, later known to the world as Madame Necker and the mother of Madame de Staël—gives a description of this society at the date when the Chevalier de Boufflers arrived in Lausanne :

"La Société du Printemps consisted of fifteen or twenty young unmarried ladies, of genteel, though not of the very first families, the eldest perhaps about twenty; all agreeable, several handsome, and two or three of exquisite beauty. At each other's houses they assembled almost every day, without the control or even the presence of a mother or aunt, they were trusted to their own prudence, amongst a crowd of young men of every nation of Europe. They laughed, they sang, they danced, they played at cards, they acted comedies; but in the midst of this careless gaiety they respected themselves, and were respected by the men. The invisible line between liberty and licentiousness was never transgressed by a gesture, a word, or a look, and their virgin chastity was never sullied by the breath of

scandal or suspicion. A singular institution, expressive of the innocent simplicity of Swiss manners."

It can be imagined how enormously the light-hearted chevalier enjoyed himself in this sort of society, and he writes home gaily to his mother :

" A day never passes without my receiving verses or sending them, without my painting a portrait and at the same time making an acquaintance, without my taking a cup of chocolate in the morning followed by three large meals ; in fact, I am enjoying myself so much that I wish you were in my place."

Geneva, that he visited later, was less to the Chevalier's taste. " Cité sournoise, où jamais l'on ne rit," said Voltaire and Boufflers heartily endorsed his verdict. " It is a large and dreary town inhabited by people who want neither for brains or money, but who make no use of either. What is prettiest in Geneva are the women ; they are bored to death, though they deserve to enjoy themselves."

It was December when the Chevalier arrived at Ferney and received a rapturous welcome from Voltaire.

" He received me as if I were his son," he writes again to his mother, " and shows me some of the kindness he would like to show to you. He remembers you as well as if he had only just seen you, and loves you as if he could see you. You can have no idea of all the good he does. He is the king and the father of the country in which he lives, he brings happiness to every one around him, and he is as good a father of a family as he is a good poet Whatever his printers may do, he will always be himself the best edition of his works. . . .

" The house is charming, the site is magnificent, the fare is delicate, and my room is delicious ; it has only one drawback—that it is not near yours, for, though I go away from you, I love you, and though I return to you I shall always love you.

" Voltaire talked a great deal about Panpan—and

how I like to hear him talked about !—and he ransacked his memory for the Abbé Porquet, but has never been able to find him ; little gems are easy to lose. Farewell, my beautiful, good, dear mother. Love me always a great deal more than I deserve ; it will still be a great deal less than I love you.”

Voltaire was enchanted with his guest, and lost no time in also writing to the woman he remembered so well as the brilliant and amusing Marquise de Boufflers, the friend of his own “ divine Émilie.”

“ I have the honour, madame, to be sheltering in my hovel the young painter you favour. You have reason indeed to love this young man ; he portrays marvellously well the absurdities of this world, and he has none himself. In this respect he is said to resemble his mother ; I think he will go far. I have seen young men of Paris and Versailles, but they were only daubers compared to him. I do not doubt that he will go to Lunéville to exercise his talents, and am persuaded that when you know him you will not be able to help loving him with all your heart. He has been a great success in Switzerland. A wag said he was here like Orpheus, only an enchanter of animals ; but the wag was wrong. As a matter of fact, there is plenty of wit in Switzerland, and your painter's worth has been very keenly recognized. . . . Keep a little kind feeling for me, and accept my sincere respect.

“ THE OLD SWISS VOLTAIRE.”

In another letter to the Maréchal de Richelieu Voltaire describes his guest's varied manner of life :

“ The Chevalier de Boufflers is one of the most original creatures in the world. He paints in pastels charmingly. He will ride off all alone at five o'clock in the morning to go and paint women in Lausanne and make friends with his models ; from there he rushes off to do the same at Geneva, and then comes back to me to rest from his labours amongst the Huguenots.”

It was to one of these Huguenots—a Madame Cramer—that Voltaire wrote this sonnet about Boufflers :

" . . . Mars l'enlève au séminaire
Tendre Vénus, il te sert ;
Il écrit avec Voltaire
Il sait peindre avec Hubert ;
Il fait tout ce qu'il veut faire.
Tous les arts sont sous sa loi.
De grâce, dis-moi, ma chère,
Ce qu'il sait faire avec toi. . . ."

Voltaire at seventy had not lost the art of versifying, and he wrote an ode to the Chevalier :

" Croyez qu'un vieillard cacochyme,
Chargé de soixante et dix ans,
Doit mettre, s'il a quelque sens,
Son corps et son âme au régime.
Dieu fit la douce illusion
Pour les heureux fous le bel âge ;
Pour les vieux fous l'ambition,
Et la retraite pour le sage.

" Régner est un amusement
Pour un vieillard triste et pesant,
De tout autre chose incapable ;
Mais vieux poète, vieil amant,
Vieux chanteur est insupportable.
C'est à vous, ô jeune Boufflers,
A vous dont notre Suisse admire
Les crayons, la prose et les vers,
Et les petits contes pour rire ;
C'est à vous à chanter Thémire
Et de briller dans un festin,
Animé du triple délire,
Des vers, de l'amour, et du vin."

To which the Chevalier replied :

" Je fus, dans mon printemps, guidé par la folie,
Dupe de mes désirs et bourreau de mes sens ;
Mais, s'il en était encore temps,
Je voudrais bien changer de vie ;
Soyez mon directeur, donnez-moi vos avis,
Convertissez-moi, je vous prie,
Vous en avez tant pervertis !

" Sur mes fautes je suis sincère,
 Et j'aime presque autant les dire que les faire.
 Je demande grâce aux amours :
 Vingt beautés à la fois trahies
 Et toutes assez bien servies,
 En beaux moments, hélas ! ont changé mes beaux jours
 J'aimais alors toutes les femmes.

" Je regrette aujourd'hui mes petits madrigaux ;
 Je regrette les airs que j'ai faits pour mes belles ;
 Je regrette vingt bons chevaux
 Qu'en courant par monts et par vaux,
 J'ai, comme moi, crevés pour elles ;
 Et je regrette encore plus
 Les utiles moments qu'en courant j'ai perdus. . . ."

Unfortunately, the Chevalier at twenty-six was still far from having exhausted his propensity for amorous adventures ; there were yet many little madrigals to be composed, many little songs to be sung, many more horses wearied in hasting towards the charmer of the hour before these flickering fancies dwindled in the light of a great love at last.

At this period of his life the only lasting affection of which he seemed capable was his devotion for his mother. Here are extracts from his last two letters to her from Ferney :

" I am sending you, for a present, a little sketch of Voltaire ¹ losing at chess. It has neither power nor accuracy, because I did it in a hurry, and in spite of the faces he makes whenever one wants to paint him, but the character of his face has been caught, and that is the important point. . . . I am still enjoying myself here, and am still loved though I stay on. You cannot imagine how agreeable this man's [Voltaire's] society is ; he would be the best old man in the world if he were not the first among men. . . . An Englishman came here yesterday who is never tired of hearing him talk English and recite all Dryden's poems as Panpan recites the

¹ This sketch was made into an engraving in the style of Rembrandt and much sought after in Paris. I have tried in vain to find a copy for reproduction in this book.

'Jeanne.' This man is too great to be contained in the bounds of his country : he is a gift from nature to the whole earth. . . .

" I painted here a pretty simpering little woman from Geneva, with much success ; and, as she was thought to be very particular, every one is on their knees to me to paint them. But I am too tired of not seeing you in the midst of all my pleasures here, to give in to their requests ; it is no good trying to enjoy myself, I miss you everywhere, for I need you in all my pleasures. Farewell, Madame la Marquise ; it is two o'clock, and I am dead with sleep, and I expect I am sending you to sleep too with my letter."

Madame de Boufflers, though delighted with her son's literary talent—for his letters were read by every one at Lunéville and in Paris—was far too lazy to send many replies, and in his last letter to her the Chevalier remarks : " I see that I shall have to return to Lunéville and help you to write to me." " Le plus errant des chevaliers " longed only now to wander to one spot on the earth's surface, and that was Lunéville. " You, *ma chère maman*, as you are worth more than everything that amuses me here, in order to break the bonds that keep me, send word that you are ill and want me—that would be a reason for throwing up everything and flying back to you. But don't go and put it vulgarly, for I shall be obliged to show your letter ! " (N'allez pas vous y prendre grossièrement, parce que je serai obligé de montrer votre lettre.)

Apparently even at this stage of her life the pen of the marquise could hardly be trusted not to overstep the bounds of propriety, and one can only hope a decorous reply was forthcoming. It contained, at any rate, the necessary summons, for soon after the Chevalier took leave of the sorrowing Voltaire and started on his homeward journey.

" Switzerland," wrote the patriarch of Ferney to Boufflers after his departure, " is astounded by you, Ferney laments your absence, the old fellow [Voltaire

himself] regrets you, loves you, and respects you infinitely."

Boufflers' journey back to Lorraine was enlivened this time by no incident more stirring than the difficulty of throwing off his incognito. It had been quite easy to transform the Chevalier de Boufflers into the obscure "Monsieur Charles," the artist, but when it came to the artist assuming the illustrious name of Boufflers, the authorities at Geneva became suspicious and the Chevalier narrowly escaped being thrown into prison as an impostor. He succeeded, however, finally in proving his identity and made his way safely back to Lunéville.

But the days of the little Court of Stanislas were now numbered. The king was growing old, and his youthful agility was impaired not only by growing infirmity but by increasing bulk. He was, in fact, so enormous that he could hardly walk about at all, and was reduced to playing eternal *tric-trac* by way of diversion. Gradually the brilliant circle he had gathered round him dispersed, gravitating to Paris in search of gaiety.

From time to time Stanislas himself journeyed to Versailles on a visit to his dearly loved Maryczka—the poor old Queen of France, now more than ever neglected by the king and courtiers. In 1765 her life was still further saddened by the death of her only son, the Dauphin. At one moment there had seemed some hope of his recovery, and the Chevalier de Boufflers was sent as envoy to carry his grandfather's congratulations; but the Chevalier arrived too late and the poor young prince died remarking pathetically that he had never enjoyed himself or done any good in the world.

After this tragic event a still deeper gloom settled over Lunéville. Even the king's daily *tric-trac* party was deserted, and the *bourgeoisie* of Lunéville had to be lured to the Château to play with him.

Madame de Boufflers, as infuriated a gambler as her sister, Madame de Mirepoix, found the innocent game of *tric-trac* far too slow a way of losing money and

waited till the King had gone to bed to play at the more fashionable game of *faro* with her friends.

Her daughter, " la divine mignonne," was now twenty-two and as plain as ever. She had been married at sixteen to the Comte de Cucé,¹ but her marriage was as disunited as most others of the period, and she continued to live at Lunéville with her mother. A few members of the old set still remained—Panpan ever faithful, Porquet still amusing, Tressan long since recovered from the pangs of unrequited love, and one or two women, such as Madame de Lenoncourt and Madame Durival, who gathered nightly at the gaming tables of the marquise.

Madame de Boufflers, to whom excitement and variety were as the breath of life, found this new order of things very hard to bear; but she was too good-hearted to neglect the king in his lonely old age. She remained at his side during the sad days that followed the death of his grandson, the Dauphin, when he refused to have any one else near him; she was with him when he went to pray at the tomb of Queen Opalinska; she listened with patience whilst he talked incessantly, as old people are wont to talk, of his approaching end. It came at last in an unexpected way.

One cold February morning the king had risen as usual at half-past six, and, dismissing his attendants, sat down before the fire to smoke his pipe, dressed in a wadded dressing-gown of Indian silk, a present from his daughter, the Queen of France. His pipe ended, the king rose and attempted to lay it down on the high mantel-piece; but, in reaching up, the edge of his dressing-gown caught fire and in a moment the cotton wadding was in a blaze. The poor old man shouted loudly for help, but by some strange misfortune all his attendants were out of hearing; he then tried to reach the bell, but in doing so he stumbled and fell forward into the fire-place. Here he lay still in flames when an old woman

¹ Louis Bruno de Boisgelin de Cucé, known later as the Comte de Boisgelin.

employed to scrub the floors heard his moans and rushed in to the rescue. Whilst calling for help she attempted herself to put out the flames, and in the effort was badly burnt. Even in his pain the king's sense of humour did not desert him : "How strange," he remarked to her, "that, at our ages, you and I should both burn with the same flame ! "

Stanislas lingered on for a fortnight, and from his death-bed dictated a last letter to his daughter Marie referring gaily to her fatal present of the wadded dressing-gown.

"You gave it to me," he said, "to keep me warm ; but it has kept me too warm."

On February 23, 1766, at the age of eighty-eight, Stanislas Leczinski ceased to breathe, and, with his last breath, the life of the little Court of Lunéville ended for ever. Since then no sounds of music and laughter have echoed from the rooms looking out on the *orangerie*, for the Château was immediately turned into barracks, and to-day the great *salons*, where once the rose-coloured slippers of the Marquise de Boufflers trod so lightly, resound only to the tramp of soldiers' feet and in the noisy life of the garrison the brilliant Court of the merry monarch Stanislas le Bienfaisant is long since forgotten.

CHAPTER IV

" AN ERRANT KNIGHT "

WITH the death of Stanislas the reign of Madame de Boufflers ended and the Court of Lunéville dispersed in all directions. The Comte de Tressan, his passion cooled, at last retired to the country and the soothing occupations of growing melons and writing romances ; the frivolous Porquet fled to Paris, where he became one of the chief ornaments of Mademoiselle Quinault's *salon*. Thither the Marquise de Boufflers, with her daughter and the Chevalier, followed him the next year. Madame de Boufflers' resources were now at a very low ebb, for so little had she used her influence over Stanislas to her own advantage that he had completely forgotten her in his will, and her private income, amounting to a sum equivalent to about £3,000 a year of our money, was all too inadequate for any one so careless and extravagant as the marquise. Paris, where she had many hospitable relations, seemed therefore the best place in which to recoup her shattered fortunes.

The only trouble was that Panpan could not be induced to join her ! Panpan, her own tame cat, Panpan whom she positively could not do without, selfishly crept away to his house in Lunéville (No. 23, Rue d'Allemagne), and all his little comforts which nothing would induce him to forego. In vain Madame de Boufflers wrote him letters describing the attractions of Paris—" mon tendre Veau "—it will be remembered that Panpan's real name was Devaux, and the marquise had adapted it to this term of endearment—" mon

tendre Veau, je n'ai pas passé trois jours sans vous écrire." She has loved him for thirty years she tells him, and the last three years have only deepened her affection. One day she will return to Lunéville: "Je vivrai et je mourrai en Lorraine mon cher Veaux"—Madame de Boufflers' spelling was always uncertain—meanwhile Marianne, his housekeeper, must take care of him and make his jams properly. There are dozens of these little notes, disconnected and kind-hearted, like the marquise herself.

But all her grief at parting from Panpan could not damp Madame de Boufflers' enjoyment of Paris. She was still only fifty-five, and was not this in the eighteenth century the very age at which to have a really good time? An old Court often produces a vogue in old age throughout society, and so the women who had been young with the king and led a riotous youth at the Court still held their own. Louis XV himself was old and *blasé*, the queen was given up to good works, and Versailles, in consequence, almost abandoned except on state occasions; but the faded yet still festive beauties of a former age betook themselves to Paris, and continued to enjoy themselves as much as ever. The most influential of all these old ladies was Madame de Boufflers' aunt, the Maréchale de Luxembourg, formerly the Duchesse de Boufflers. Twenty-four years earlier the Marquise de Boufflers, as a young married woman, had arrived in Paris on a visit to her mother-in-law the old marquise, who was in perpetual mourning for her husband. The young marquise found this far from exhilarating, and would have had a very dull time indeed if the Duchesse de Boufflers—sister-in-law of the old marquise¹—had not come to the rescue and introduced her niece to the gay world she frequented.

The duchesse, then thirty-seven and at the height of her successes, was one of the most scandalous women of her day. At the Court of the Regent her gallantries

¹ See Genealogy of the de Boufflers in Appendix.

had been of so outrageous a description that the Comte de Tressan—the lover of the Marquise de Boufflers—had immortalized her in a poem beginning with these daring lines :

" Quand Boufflers parut à la cour
On crut voir la Mère d'Amour.
Chacun s'empressait à lui plaire,
Et chacun l'avait à son tour."

The duchess, whose strongest weapon through life was an imperturbable sang-froid, declared herself delighted with the verse when it reached her ears.

"It is so clever," she remarked to the Comte de Tressan, whom she shrewdly suspected of having composed it, "that I would not only forgive the author, but I would embrace him!" The guileless Tressan immediately fell into the trap. "Well, Madame la Duchesse, it was I!" But, instead of the promised embrace, the unfortunate poet found himself soundly boxed on both ears.

The wild career of the Duchesse de Boufflers came, however, to an end in 1747, when the duc died. Three years later, she made a second marriage with the Maréchal Duc de Luxembourg, and therewith turned over a new leaf. Henceforth no one more correct than the Maréchale de Luxembourg could be imagined, and with her great name and position she had little difficulty in obliterating her abandoned past from the accommodating memory of her world. Society in its essentials remains the same throughout the ages ; like an uncertain tempered dog, it snarls loudest at the timorous. The woman who flinches is lost—let her approach it fearlessly, pat it boldly on the head, and it will lick her hand in admiration. So this amazing woman, twice a duchess, continued for thirty years to pat society on the head and in the virtuous Maréchale de Luxembourg the gallantries of the Duchesse de Boufflers were completely forgotten. Only on one fatal occasion did her past rise up and confront her with embarrassing directness ;

this was when the Comte de Vaudreuil, a young man new to the Paris world, made his first appearance at the great Hôtel de Luxembourg. The maréchale, who enjoyed collecting successful artists at her supper-parties, had heard of the Comte de Vaudreuil's musical talents, and at the end of supper turned to him, remarking graciously : " Monsieur, I hear that you sing extremely well ! I should be charmed to hear you, but pray give us no grand air, only something simple ! I love all that is natural, gay, and witty ! "

Whereupon Monsieur de Vaudreuil, who had entirely failed to realize the identity of his hostess with the notorious Duchesse de Boufflers, broke into the first line of the famous couplet :

" Quand Boufflers parut à la cour——"

The consternation of the guests can be imagined ; what was to be done to stop this terrible young man before he reached the fatal fourth line ? An outbreak of coughs, sneezes, and throat-clearings failed entirely to drown the fine, sonorous voice of the singer until, suddenly finding every eye fixed on him in strangled horror, he paused abruptly. A moment, but only one moment, of hideous silence followed before the ready wit of the Maréchale de Luxembourg came to her rescue, and in a clear and hearty voice she sang the last line herself !

The situation was saved, and every one breathed freely.

It is easy to understand that a woman with these powers of resource should be able to steer a triumphant course through life, and she became in time the supreme arbiter of *le bon air* and *le bon ton* of her day. A young woman making her début in Paris at this period must of course be formally presented at Versailles, but the impression she created at the Hôtel de Luxembourg was of far greater importance.

The arrival of the maréchale at a country house with

her retinue of servants in gorgeous liveries and her cat—known to society respectfully as "Madame Brillant"—was enough to throw the whole party into a state of nervous apprehension lest some detail of the arrangements or some indiscretion of behaviour should incur the great lady's disapproval. Yet in appearance she was far from formidable—"a quiet little woman dressed in brown taffetas with a cap and cuffs of plain hemstitched muslin and no jewels or furbelows of any kind."¹

She was exceedingly generous to the poor; on her walks about Paris which Tronchin, her doctor, insisted on her taking daily, she used to carry gold coins in the knob of her long cane to distribute to any one who asked for alms, and at her death in 1787 she was honoured as a public benefactress.

It is evident that she was thoroughly kind-hearted, and though she might prove a formidable enemy she was certainly an invaluable friend. So the Marquise de Boufflers, reappearing in Paris under her powerful wing, found her social path made straight before her. Ere long she was enjoying herself wildly, flying from fête to fête, dining, supping, gambling, flirting, and turning night into day.

"She amuses herself as if she were only fifteen," wrote Madame de Lenoncourt, her old friend from Lorraine, to Panpan after meeting her in Paris, and she proceeds to pour forth on the maddening elusiveness of Madame de Boufflers.

"I supped three days running with your marquise; now perhaps I shall be three months without seeing her again. There are not enough card-parties in Paris, not enough princes, not enough plays for her—what time is left her? And then she maintains that she is fond of me! It enrages me—I wish I could find a good excuse for breaking with her!"²

¹ "Mémoires de la Marquise de Créquy."

² All these letters from Madame de Lenoncourt are quoted from "La Marquise de Boufflers et son fils le Chevalier," by Gaston Maugras.

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"It is impossible," Madame de Lenoncourt writes again indignantly, "to settle anything with her—she is always at the place she did not expect to be at a quarter of an hour before. . . . She escapes like a bird, and it is a real grief to miss her all the time and see her seldom." That was the trouble—however annoyed one might feel with her one could not get on without her! She was so tiresome, so unreliable, yet so amusing, so unlike any one else, that it was no good trying to give her up and content oneself with worthier people. Who has not met her replica in London to-day—the woman incapable of consecutive thought or of settled purpose, who light-heartedly sacrifices every one's convenience to her own amusement, yet who charms by her very irresponsibility and whose gaiety disarms resentment? The Marquise de Boufflers was a type of woman more often to be met with in our century than in her own. In those days it was still the custom to be punctilious, to keep engagements, to converse connectedly, to write carefully worded letters. Madame de Boufflers would have none of this; the whim of the moment was her only law, and though she reduced her friends to frenzy, she kept them all the same. On her arrival in Paris she had found another old friend from Lorraine who evidently absorbed her a great deal more than poor Madame de Lenoncourt. This was the Chevalier de Listenay, now the Prince de Bauffremont, who had admired her in the old days in Lunéville, and now fell hopelessly in love with her. The prince was a bachelor, and every mother in society had designs on him for her daughter; but the prince had no eyes for any one but Madame de Boufflers, whom he followed about everywhere, and refused to be lured from her side by the most tempting invitations. The Duc de Choiseul had a bet with Madame du Deffand that Madame de Boufflers would marry the prince in the end; but the duc lost, for Madame de Boufflers was enjoying herself far too much to enter on any engage-

ment so binding as marriage, and she remained a widow till her death.

As time went on her passion for gambling—the besetting vice of her family—led her more and more into debt. Wherever high play prevailed at the Maréchale de Luxembourg's, at her sister's the Maréchale de Mirepoix, at the Prince de Condé's, at the Court, the indefatigable marquise was to be found playing far into the night—even on through the next day without rising from the table; winning, then encouraged to win more; losing, then venturing another throw in the hope of retrieving losses, as gamblers have always done since the world began. It was no uncommon thing for her to lose 1,000 louis in an evening, and the Chevalier, who was often with his mother on these occasions, lost 200 louis, of which he did not possess a penny. Even the Abbé Porquet allowed himself to be carried away by the prevailing mania into losing nearly everything he had. "The Birds' frenzy for gambling is infectious," Madame du Deffand wrote after a card-party in her *appartement*, where they had played till five o'clock in the morning. "The Birds" was the term by which Madame du Deffand invariably referred in her letters to the inseparable trio: Madame de Boufflers, her daughter, Madame de Boisgelin, and her niece, Madame de Cambis; when Madame de Boufflers alone is in question she is spoken of as "the Mother Bird"—"la Mère Oiseau."

Madame du Deffand herself was too clever to ruin herself at faro or *biribi*, and she played seldom; her *salon* was far more intellectual than that of the Maréchale de Luxembourg, and so she was inclined to feel a light contempt for Madame de Boufflers' set. "The Birds," she says, "are the frivolous flock admitted indiscriminately everywhere." They were certainly foolish, these feckless birds, with their craze for gambling and indifference to anything but the claims of the passing hour, but they amused Madame du

Deffand. The "Mother-Bird" was kind-hearted too; hardly a day passed without her dropping in at the Couvent St. Joseph to enliven the old blind woman with chatter about "operas, comedies, books old and new, dress, and pompons."

Meanwhile, the Chevalier de Boufflers, still in Paris with his mother and sister, was at the height of his popularity. Every *mémoriste* of the period refers to his *bons mots* and his verses. "The Chevalier's *bon mot* is excellent," wrote Horace Walpole to Mr. Conway: "and so is he. He has as much *bouffonnerie* as the Italians, with more wit and novelty. His impromptu verses are often admirable. Get Madame du Deffand to show you his 'Embassy to the Princesse Christine. . . .'" Madame du Deffand, who often mentions the Chevalier in her letters, had apparently a peculiar fondness for his disrespectful verses on the "Puffy Princess," for we hear of her singing them after supper to the assembled company at a party given by the King of Sweden—a strange performance for an old lady of seventy-four!

The Chevalier's own supper-parties were some of the gayest in Paris. "You have supped with the Chevalier de Boufflers," Walpole writes again; "did he act everything in the world, and sing everything in the world, and laugh at everything in the world?"

Chamfort, the wit, and author of the "Maximes," described Boufflers as he appeared at this period in the following verses:

"Tes voyages et tes bons mots,
Tes jolis vers et tes chevaux
Sont cités par toute la France;
On sait par cœur ces riens charmants
Que tu produis avec aisance;
Tes pastels frais et ressemblants
Peuvent se passer d'indulgence,
Les beaux esprits de notre temps,
Quoique s'aimant avec outrance,
Troqueraient volontiers, je pense,
Tous leurs drames et leurs romans
Pour ton heureuse négligence
Et la moitié de tes talents.

" Jouis bien d'un destin si beau,
 Brille dans nos camps, à Cythère ;
 Sûr de plaire, et toujours nouveau
 Chante les plaisirs et Voltaire ;

" Garde ton goût pour les voyages,
 Tous les pays en sont jaloux ;
 Et le plus aimable des fous
 Sera partout chéri des sages,
 Sois plus amoureux que jamais ;
 Peins en courant toutes les belles,
 Et sois payé de tes portraits
 Entre les bras de tes modèles."

This was Boufflers as the world saw him—"le plus aimable des fous," a wit, who but for his subtlety might have been simply a buffoon, a rake, who but for his fastidiousness might have been a debauchee. In Paris no supper-party was complete without him—his strange face with the mocking mouth and small, piercing eyes was to be seen at the supper table in the gorgeous dining-hall of the Hôtel de Luxembourg with its marble floor, its gods and goddesses overhead ; at Sophie Arnoult's, the actress whose lovely face Greuze has immortalized for us, or in the gilded rooms at the Louvre where "all that was most powerful and illustrious at the Court and most important in the town came reverently" to the receptions of the retired actress, the great Mademoiselle Quinault.

But there was another Boufflers—Boufflers, as his friends knew him, and of these the most devoted was that naïf and charming creature—the Prince de Ligne. "Charlot," as Boufflers called him, adored his friend. "I prefer the Chevalier de Boufflers to the whole dictionary of the Encyclopédistes !"

"He wishes, I believe, to be like the Chevalier," Madame du Deffand wrote of the Prince de Ligne ; "but he has not nearly so much wit." Yet the portrait he has left us of Boufflers shows that he was no slavish imitator of his friend, and is so delightful that it must be quoted at length :

"Monsieur de Boufflers was in turn an 'abbé,' a soldier, an author, an administrator, a deputy, and a philosopher; and amongst all these callings he was only out of place in the first. Monsieur de Boufflers thought a great deal but always, unfortunately, in haste. His restlessness is what has most deprived us of his wit. . . . One would like to be able to glean all the ideas he let fall on the high-road, together with his time and his money. He had, perhaps, too much mind to be able to fix it on anything whilst the ardour of youth inspired him; this mind of his had to work on its account and subdue its master, and so he shone at first with all the fitfulness of a will o' the wisp, but age alone gave him the steadiness of a beacon. A limitless wisdom, profound subtlety, airiness that was never frivolous, the talent for giving point to ideas by the contrast of words—these are the distinctive qualities of a mind to which nothing is unfamiliar. Happily he does not know everything, but he has skimmed all kinds of knowledge, and by his depth surprises those who think him frivolous, by his lightness those who have discovered he was deep. The foundation of his character is an unbounded goodness of heart (*une bonté sans mesure*); he could not endure the idea of any suffering creature, and would give up the actual necessities of life to help him. He would go without bread to feed even a reprobate, above all his enemy: 'Poor wretch!' he would say. He had a servant on his land whom every one denounced to him as a thief; in spite of that he kept her on, and when asked why he did so answered, 'Who would take her?' There is childishness in his laugh, and awkwardness in his bearing; he holds his head down and twiddles his thumbs in front of him like a harlequin, or else keeps his hands behind his back as if he were warming himself; his eyes, small and agreeable, seem to smile; there is something kindly in his face, something simple, gay, and naïf in his manner; there is heaviness in his figure and carelessness in his person. He sometimes has the stupid look of La Fontaine, and one would say he is thinking of nothing when he is thinking the most."

Several of his biographers have described Boufflers

as ugly, but "Madame de Créquy"¹ tells us this was a slanderous legend started by a jealous rival, the Abbé de Talleyrand, who, at the time of the publication of "Aline, Reine de Golconde," attempted to pass himself off as the author of the famous story. Boufflers, hearing of the imposture, waited till he met the Abbé de Talleyrand in the *salon* of the Duchesse de Choiseul, and then broke a pause in the conversation by asking him genially whether he happened to know the works of Rabelais.

"Obviously," the abbé said drily.

"Obviously? Yet not well!" said the Chevalier.

"Dare I ask you why?"

"Monsieur l'Abbé," answered the author of "Aline" with a bow, "I asked you whether you knew the works of Rabelais because I had omitted to tell you that it was I who wrote them."

"Out of revenge for this," "Madame de Créquy"¹ says, "the abbé went about saying everywhere that the Chevalier was intolerably ugly, and this is a point I cannot admit. Monsieur de Boufflers has nothing in his face that is not dignified and noble, intelligent and witty, and this is all that can be required of a man's appearance. . . ."

It is evident, however, that the Chevalier was by no means an Adonis; moreover, in spite of the good qualities described by the Prince de Ligne, he had several very bad faults. One was temper—he would fly into a passion on the smallest provocation, and then recover himself as quickly. His early life at Lunéville, and later on in Paris, taught him nothing of self-control or restraint, whilst morality, as we have seen, was non-existent at this period. What wonder, then, that Boufflers, with passions intensified by an artistic temperament, flung himself into dissipation of every kind?

¹ The authorship of these Mémoires is doubtful and therefore when referred to in this book the name of Madame de Créquy appears in inverted commas.



CHARLES MAURICE DE TALLEYRAND.

Life in Paris at that period was, for a young man with talents, a perpetual feast, and the Chevalier was extraordinarily versatile. He rode magnificently, danced, sang, and acted brilliantly, painted, played the violin, composed neat verses at a moment's notice, and made love with all the skill and finesse of his day.

"Women revelled in him," says one of his contemporaries. "He adored them as they wish to be adored, with fury but without fidelity, for fear of boredom. He swore them eternal passions of a fortnight and he kept his word faithfully."¹

For love, to him, was simply an art like all the rest. His love-affairs were endless; yet, if no woman at this moment had the power to hold him it was because she merely charmed his senses and never touched his heart. Many women, too, gave themselves too readily, and Boufflers was too adventurous to find pleasure in easy conquest. One day he laughingly wrote these lines to a lady who "threatened to make him happy":

À UNE JEUNE FEMME

(QUI ME MENAÇAIT DE ME RENDRE HEUREUX).

"O ciel! je suis perdu! Quoi! déjà des faveurs!
Quand j'ai promis d'être fidèle,
Quand je vous ai juré les plus tendres ardeurs,
Je m'étais attendu que vous seriez cruelle;
Je m'étais arrangé pour trouver des rigueurs;
Ah! si je vous suis cher, soyez plus inhumaine;
Laissez à mon amour le charme des désirs:
Pour le faire durer, faites durer sa peine;
Je ne vous réponds pas qu'il survive aux plaisirs."

"Boufflers," says Monsieur Druon, "was really the spoilt child of his century," and certainly every one did their best to spoil him. The country houses welcomed him as rapturously as the *salons* of Paris; at Montmorency, with his great-aunt the Maréchale de Luxembourg, at L'Isle Adam with the Prince de Conti, at Chanteloup with the Duc de Choiseul, later on at Saint-

¹ "Récits d'un vieux parrain," by Charles Brifaut.

Ouen with the Duc de Nivernais, the arrival of the Chevalier was greeted with shrieks of delight. He would appear often quite unexpectedly ; the guests, looking out of the windows, would suddenly perceive an odd figure on some strange screw of a horse wandering across country over hedges and ditches, and ambling finally up to the door. Behold ! it was the Chevalier de Boufflers, whose recent losses at cards had reduced him to this makeshift steed. Then what laughter and rejoicings would follow, what impromptu rhyming, what glorious fooling, what rollicking songs around the harpsichord !

It was at Montmorency that Boufflers, a few years earlier, whilst still a seminarist, had encountered Jean Jacques Rousseau, who was then living in the Mont-Louis, and, whilst paving the way for the Revolution with his satires against the society he professed to despise, was basking complacently in the favour of the once profligate old maréchale. Boufflers evidently agreed with his friend the Duchesse de Choiseul in her opinion of the philosopher, whom she described as a "charlatan of virtue." Rousseau, she declared, would go to the scaffold willingly if it would add to his celebrity. To be unnoticed was the one thing he could not endure, and he was deeply mortified to find that Boufflers took no notice of him. "The Abbé de Boufflers, a young man as brilliant as it is possible to be," he says naïvely in his "Confessions," "was the only person in the maréchale's society who never paid me the least attention." He observed, moreover, that after Boufflers' visits to Montmorency his own popularity waned appreciably, his discourses appeared dull and heavy beside the abbé's sparkling wit, and even the maréchale herself seemed to think less of him. Desperate to reinstate himself, he attempted to conciliate Boufflers, with fatal results, for Boufflers only responded to his advances with a practical joke. He painted an appalling portrait of the maréchale, which she declared with truth was not in the least like her. Boufflers, so as to put Rousseau in a corner, appealed to

him for his opinion. "The portrait," says Jean Jacques, "was horrible. . . . The treacherous abbé consulted me, and, like a fool and a liar, I said the picture was a good likeness. I wanted to cajole the abbé, but I did not cajole the maréchale, who put me in her black books, and the abbé, having brought off his *coup*, made fun of me."

After this it is not surprising to find Rousseau writing acidly of our Chevalier: "He has many half-talents . . . he makes little verses and writes little letters very well, plays the timbrel, and daubs a little in pastel."

Rousseau had now left Montmorency, and Boufflers' popularity was greater than ever. Even the shy little Duchesse de Lauzun thawed in time beneath the rays of her cousin's gaiety. Amélie de Boufflers, the granddaughter of the Maréchale de Luxembourg, had married, when she was only fourteen, the dissipated Duc de Lauzun, who never showed her the least affection. Rousseau adored her. "Amélie de Boufflers," he wrote, "has the face, the gentleness, and the timidity of a virgin; there can be nothing more pleasant or more interesting than her face, nothing tenderer or more chaste than the sentiments she inspires." She was indeed so timid—like "a little frightened bird," says Madame du Deffand—that at first her witty cousin paralysed her with terror, and she could not say a word to him. "She is as amiable as one can be by signs!" wrote Boufflers laughingly; but after a while they became the best of friends, and he composed verses for her so complimentary that they bathed her in blushes but met with no rebuff.

However, neither the Arcadian joys of the country houses nor the suppers of Paris satisfied for long the restless Chevalier de Boufflers, and we find him perpetually rushing off on some wild chase after adventure.

The struggle of Corsica for liberty under Paoli took him post-haste to that island.

"I have always had a fancy for revolutions [J'ai toujours eu la fantaisie des révolutions]," he wrote from Marseilles to the Duchesse de Choiseul, little

dreaming how terribly his fancy was one day to be realized. "I shall be very glad to see this poor people throw off a horrible yoke. I have formed great ideas of Paoli, of his virtues and his talents. A man who has done everything without resources, who has resisted rulers more powerful than himself, who has succeeded in governing his fellow countrymen, ungovernable hitherto, who has only used his authority to ensure the liberty of his nation, seems to me a worthy successor of the Romans and of the greatest kind of Romans."

The Chevalier was not wrong in his estimate of Paoli—a greater man than Boufflers, Napoleon Bonaparte, born the following year in Corsica, found in Paoli his earliest inspirations. Paoli became the idol of Napoleon, who, like Boufflers, shared his adoration for the Romans. But the Revolution estranged them, for Paoli could not forgive the usurper of the throne of France or the people that had committed the excesses of 1793. "The wretches!" he exclaimed to Lucien Bonaparte, "they have murdered their king! their king, the best of men! A saint, a saint, a saint! No, Corsica will have no more of them, nor will I! Let them keep their blood-stained liberty; it is not needed by my brave mountaineers. It would be better for us to become Genoese again."

These expeditions of the Chevalier's proved, of course, disastrous to his finances, and he was obliged at times to search for remunerative employment. Thus, in 1770, we find him once more soliciting a diplomatic mission through the Duc de Choiseul—who was still at that date a minister of the king—in the following characteristic letter:

"MONSIEUR LE DUC,

"I am told that the confinement of the Infanta of Parma is shortly expected, and you are too polite not to pay her a little compliment. I hasten to offer my services, as I have been thinking that you would perhaps send an 'envoy extraordinary,' and you certainly could not find one more extraordinary than myself. I am not new to politics; I had my first en-

counter with the Princess Christine, from there I went to Frankfurt to drink the health of the King of the Romans, and some time later I arrived at the death of the Dauphin to compliment him on his recovery. I feel that I have all the required ability and talents to harangue, on this occasion, the father, the mother, and even the child without a word of remonstrance from any one ; but what will please me most will be to go all over Italy afterwards on the profits of my embassy and to travel on velvet. I think my plan will be much appreciated by my creditors, and I hope it will be by you also. Awaiting your reply, I am, monsieur le duc, with all respect," etc.

The duke, strange to say, declined the services of this candid ambassador, and Boufflers was obliged to cast about for some other mission. Soldiering was no doubt his natural profession, and at this moment the prospect of a campaign in Poland offered itself. The patriotic insurrection known as the "Confederation of Bar," directed against Catherine II of Russia, was just beginning, and it occurred to the Chevalier to offer his services to the Poles. Once again the cause of freedom was in question, and the idea of fighting for a small oppressed people against Catherine the Great fired his imagination.

So, bidding farewell to his friends in Paris, he set forth for the East of Europe, stopping on his way at Lunéville to pay a flying visit to his old friends Panpan and Madame de Lenoncourt.

"The Chevalier," Madame de Lenoncourt says in a letter to Paris, "arrived here yesterday from Chanteloup as mad as his mother ; he is starting for Vienna, Germany, Bohemia, and has not a penny. . . . He is going to serve in the army of the Confederates in Poland, where he will be hashed or hung. Why play at the knight errant ? It is most annoying."¹

Voltaire, at that time an ardent admirer of the

¹ From "La Marquise de Boufflers et son fils le Chevalier," by Gaston Maugras.

Semiramis of the North, as he called Catherine the Great, was equally derisive of Boufflers' latest project.

"If I were to question the Chevalier de Boufflers," he says in a letter of this date to the Empress, "I should ask him how he could be so absurd as to join those wretched confederates who are wanting in everything, above all in good sense, rather than go to pay his court to the one who will bring them to their senses. . . . I implore your Majesty to make him a prisoner of war; he will amuse you very much; there is nothing so original as he is, nor sometimes so agreeable. He will compose songs for you, he will sketch you, he will paint you. . . ." To this the great Catherine, who saw no humour in the Chevalier going to the rescue of her rebellious subjects, replied drily: "I have a remedy for dandies without a vocation who leave Paris to act as preceptors to brigands. This remedy comes from Siberia, and is taken on the spot."

But Boufflers' philosophy, unlike Voltaire's, did not include a worship of the great. He had, as we have seen, none of the talents of a courtier; his sympathies were always with the weak and oppressed.

Unfortunately, he was destined to disillusionment, for the Poles whose cause he had taken up with so much fervour proved churlish and ungrateful. Arriving on the frontier of Poland, he found nothing ready for the campaign, and the forces he had been promised were not forthcoming.

"The Polish marshals," he wrote, "laugh at the Confederation; they take every one's money and no one's orders." And so, instead of the fighting he had hoped for, the Chevalier found himself condemned to a maddening inactivity. "Hard work is nothing, but the tedium of contradiction, the continual realization of one's own helplessness, the ingratitude of the people one serves, the ill-will of those on whom one depends, are torture to the soul."